RIMROCK JONES

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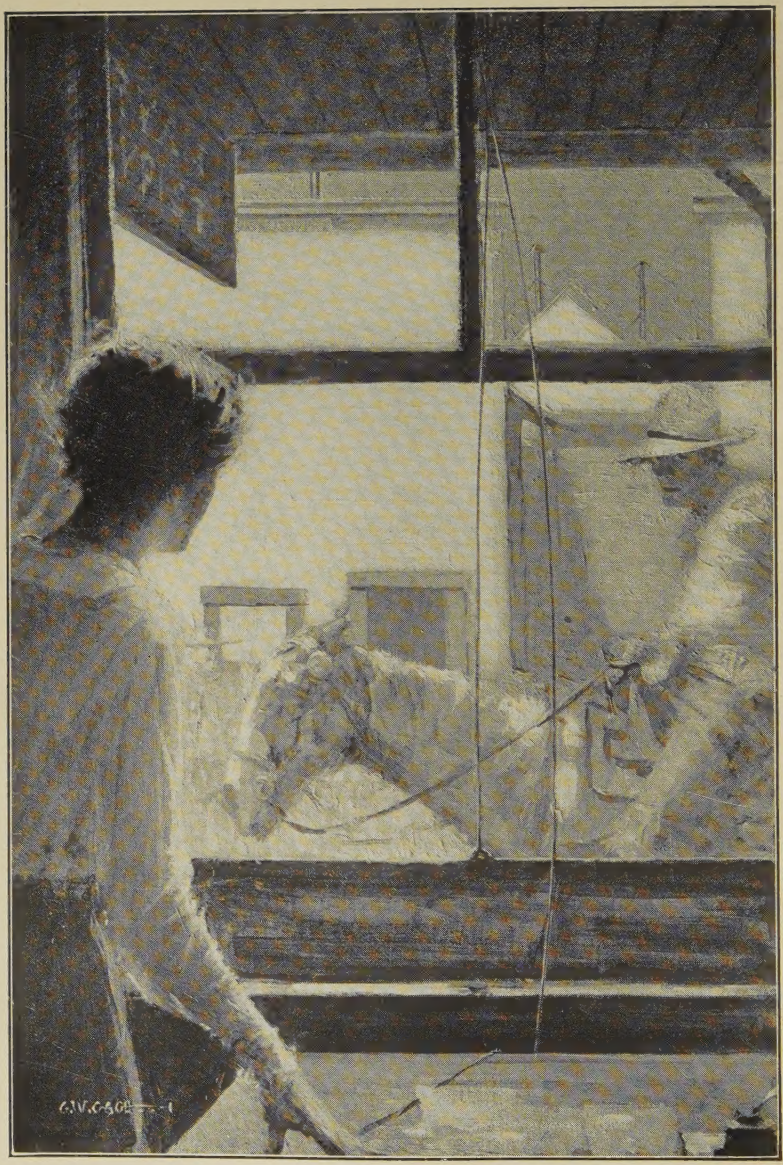

And as he passed, he looked in under the shadow of his hat, and touched a bag that was tied behind his saddle

RIMROCK JONES

BY

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CHAPTER I

The Man with a Gun

THE peace of midday lay upon Gunsight, broken only by the distant *chang, chang* of bells as a ten-mule ore-team came toiling in from the mines. In the cool depths of the umbrella tree in front of the Company's office a Mexican ground-dove crooned endlessly his ancient song of love, but Gunsight took no notice. Its thoughts were not of love but of money.

The dusty team of mules passed down the street, dragging their double-trees reluctantly, and took their cursing meekly as they made the turn at the tracks. A switch engine bumped along the sidings, snaking ore-cars down to the bins and bunting them up to the chutes, but except for its bangings and clamor the town was still. An aged Mexican, armed with a long bunch of willow brush, swept idly at the sprinkled street and Old Hassayamp Hicks, the proprietor of the Alamo Saloon, leaned back in his rawhide chair and watched him with good-natured contempt.

The town was dead, after a manner of speaking,

and yet it was not dead. In the Gunsight Hotel where the officials of the Company left their womenfolks to idle and fret and gossip, there was a restless flash of white from the upper veranda; and in the office below Andrew McBain, the aggressive President of the Gunsight Mining and Developing Company, paced nervously to and fro as he dictated letters to a typist. He paused, and as the clacking stopped a woman who had been reading a novel on the veranda rose up noiselessly and listened over the railing. The new typist was really quite deaf—one could hear every word that was said. She was pretty, too,—and—well, she dressed too well, for one thing.

But McBain was not making love to his typist. He had stopped with a word on his lips and stood gazing out the window. The new typist had learned to read faces and she followed his glance with a start. Who was this man that Andrew McBain was afraid of? He came riding in from the desert, a young man, burly and masterful, mounted on a buckskin horse and with a pistol slung low on his leg. McBain turned white, his stern lips drew tighter and he stood where he had stopped in his stride like a wolf that has seen a fierce dog; then suddenly he swung forward again and his voice rang out harsh and defiant. The new typist took the words down at haphazard, for her thoughts were not on her work. She was thinking of the man with a gun. He had gone by without a glance, and yet McBain was afraid of him.

A couple of card players came out of the Alamo and stopped to talk with Hassayamp.

"Well, bless my soul," exclaimed the watchful Hassayamp as he suddenly brought his chair down with a bump, "if hyer don't come that locoed scoundrel, Rimrock! Say, that boy's crazy, don't you know he is—jest look at that big sack of rocks!"

He rose up heavily and stepped out into the street, shading his eyes from the glare of the sun.

"Hello thar, Rimmy!" he rumbled bluffly as the horseman waved his hand, "whar you been so long, and nothin' heard of you? There's been a woman hyer, enquirin' for you, most every day for a month now!"

"'S that so?" responded Rimrock guardedly. "Well, say, boys, I've struck it rich!"

He leaned back to untie a sack of ore, but Old Hassayamp was not to be deterred.

"Yes sir," he went on opening up his eyes triumphantly, "a widdy woman—says you owe her two-bits for some bread!"

He laughed uproariously at this pointed jest and clambered back to the plank sidewalk where he sat down convulsed in his chair.

"Aw, you make me tired!" said Rimrock shortly. "You know I don't owe no woman."

"You owe every one else, though," came back Hassayamp with a Texas yupe; "I got you there, boy. You shore cain't git around that!"

"Huh!" grunted Rimrock as he swung lightly to the ground. "Two bits, maybe! Four bits! A couple of dollars! What's that to talk about when a man is out after millions? Is my credit good for the drinks? Well, come on in then, boys; and I'll show you something good!"

He led the way through the swinging doors and Hassayamp followed ponderously. The card players followed also and several cowboys, appearing as if by miracle, lined up along with the rest. Old Hassayamp looked them over grimly, breathed hard and spread out the glasses.

"Well, all right, Rim," he observed, "between friends—but don't bid in the whole town."

"When I drink, my friends drink," answered Rimrock and tossed off his first drink in a month. "Now!" he went on, fetching out his sack, "I'll show you something good!"

He poured out a pile of blue-gray sand and stood away from it admiringly.

Old Hassayamp drew out his glasses and balanced them on his nose, then he gazed at the pile of sand.

"Well," he said, "what is it, anyway?"

"It's copper, by grab, mighty nigh ten per cent copper, and you can scoop it up with a shovel. There's worlds of it, Hassayamp, a whole doggoned mountain! That's the trouble, there's almost too much! I can't handle it, man, it'll take millions to do it; but believe me, the millions are there.

All I need is a stake now, just a couple of thousand dollars——"

"Huh!" grunted Hassayamp looking up over his glasses, "you don't reckon I've got that much, do you, to sink in a pile of *sand?*"

"If not you, then somebody else," replied Rimrock confidently. "Some feller that's out looking for sand. I heard about a sport over in London that tried on a bet to sell five-pound notes for a shilling. That's like me offering to sell you twenty-five dollars for the English equivalent of two bits. And d'ye think he could get anyone to take 'em? He stood up on a soap box and waved those notes in the air, but d'ye think he could get anybody to buy?"

He paused with a cynical smile and looked Hassayamp in the eye.

"Well—no," conceded Hassayamp weakly.

"You bet your life he could!" snapped back Rimrock. "A guy came along that knowed. He took one look at those five-pound notes and handed up fifty cents."

" 'I'll take two of 'em,' he says; and walks off with fifty dollars!"

Rimrock scooped up his despised sand and poured it back into the bag, after which he turned on his heel. As the doors swung to behind him Old Hassayamp looked at his customers and shook his head impressively. From the street outside Rimrock could be heard telling a Mexican in Spanish to take his horse

to the corrals. He was master of Gunsight yet, though all his money had vanished and his credit would buy nothing but the drinks.

"Well, what d'ye know about that?" observed Hassayamp meditatively. "By George, sometimes I almost think that boy is right!"

He cleared his throat and hobbled towards the door and the crowd took the hint to disperse.

On the edge of the shady sidewalk Rimrock Jones, the follower after big dreams, sat silent, balancing the sack of ore in a bronzed and rock-scarred hand. He was a powerful man, with the broad, square-set shoulders that come from much swinging of a double jack or cranking at a windlass. The curling beard of youth had covered his hard-bitten face and his head was unconsciously thrust forward, as if he still glimpsed his vision and was eager to follow it further. The crowd settled down and gazed at him curiously, for they knew he had a story to tell, and at last the great Rimrock sighed and looked at his work-worn hands.

"Hard going," he said, glancing up at Hassayamp. "I've got a ten-foot hole to sink on twenty different claims, no powder, and nothing but Mexicans for help. But I sure turned up some good ore—she gets richer the deeper you go."

"Any gold?" enquired Hassayamp hopefully.

"Yes, but pocketty. I leave all that chloriding to the Mexicans while I do my discovery work. They've got some picked rock on the dump."

"Why don't you quit that dead work and do a little chloriding yourself? Pound out a little gold—that's the way to get a stake!"

Old Hassayamp spat the words out impatiently, but Rimrock seemed hardly to hear.

"Nope," he said, "no pocket-mining for me. There's copper there, millions of tons of it. I'll make my winning yet."

"Huh!" grunted Hassayamp, and Rimrock came out of his trance.

"You don't think so, hey?" he challenged and then his face softened to a slow, reminiscent smile.

"Say, Hassayamp," he said, "did you ever hear about that prospector that found a thousand pounds of gold in one chunk? He was lost on the desert, plumb out of water and forty miles from nowhere. He couldn't take the chunk along with him and if he left it there the sand would cover it up. Now what was that poor feller to do?"

"Well, what did he do?" enquired Hassayamp cautiously.

"He couldn't make up his mind," answered Rimrock, "so he stayed there till he starved to death."

"You're plumb full of these sayings and parables, ain't you?" remarked Hassayamp sarcastically. "What's that got to do with the case?"

"Well," began Rimrock, sitting down on the edge of the sidewalk and looking absently up the street, "take me, for instance. I go out across the desert

to the Tecolotes and find a whole mountain of copper. You don't have to chop it out with chisels, like that native copper around the Great Lakes; and you don't have to go underground and do timbering like they do around Bisbee and Cananea. All you have to do is to shoot it down and scoop it up with a steam shovel. Now I've located the whole danged mountain and done most of my discovery work, but if some feller don't give me a boost, like taking that prospector a canteen of water, I've either got to lose my mine or sit down and starve to death. If I'd never done anything, it'd be different, but you know that I *made* the Gunsight."

He leaned forward and fixed the saloon keeper with his earnest eyes and Old Hassayamp held up both hands.

"Yes, yes, boy, I know!" he broke out hurriedly. "Don't talk to me—I'm convinced. But by George, Rim, you can spend more money and have less to show for it than any man I know. What's the use? That's what we all say. What's the use of staking you when you'll turn right around in front of us and throw the money away? Ain't I staked you? Ain't L. W. staked you?"

"Yes! And he broke me, too!" answered Rimrock, raising his voice to a defiant boom. "Here he comes now, the blue-faced old dastard!"

He thrust out his jaw and glared up the street where L. W. Lockhart, the local banker, came stump-

ing down the sidewalk. L. W. was tall and rangy, with a bulldog jaw clamped down on a black cigar, and an air of absolute detachment from his surroundings.

"Yes, I mean you!" shouted Rimrock insultingly as L. W. went grimly past. "You claim to be a white man, and then stand in with that lawyer to beat me out of my mine. I made you, you old nickel-pincher, and now you go by me and don't even say: 'Have a drink!'"

"You're drunk!" retorted Lockhart, looking back over his shoulder, and Rimrock jumped to his feet.

"I'll show you!" he cried, starting angrily after him, and L. W. turned swiftly to meet him.

"You'll show me *what?*" he demanded coldly as Rimrock put his hand to his gun.

"Never mind!" answered Rimrock. "You know you jobbed me. I let you in on a good thing and you sold me out to McBain. I want some money and if you don't give it to me I'll—I'll go over and collect from him."

"Oh, you want some money, hey?" repeated Lockhart. "I thought you was going to *show* me something!"

The banker scowled as he rolled his cigar, but there was a twinkle far back in his eyes. "You're bad now, ain't you?" he continued tauntingly. "You're just feeling awful! You're going to jump on Lon Lockhart and stomp him into the ground! Huh!"

"Aw, shut your mouth!" answered Rimrock defiantly, "I never said a word about fight."

"Uhhr!" grunted L. W. and put his hand in his pocket at which Rimrock became suddenly expectant.

"Henry Jones," began the banker, "I knowed your father and he was an honorable, hardworking man. You're nothing but a bum and you're getting worse—why don't you go and put up that gun?"

"I don't have to!" retorted Rimrock but he moved up closer and there was a wheedling turn to his voice. "Just two thousand dollars, Lon—that's all I ask of you—and I'll give you a share in my mine. Didn't I come to you first, when I discovered the Gunsight, and give you the very best claim? And you ditched me, L. W., dad-burn you, you know it; you sold me out to McBain. But I've got something now that runs up into millions! All it needs is a little more work!"

"Yes, and forty miles of railroad," put in L. W. intolerantly. "I wouldn't take the whole works for a gift!"

"No, but Lon, I'm lucky—you know that yourself—I can go East and sell the old mine."

"Oh, you're lucky, are you?" interrupted L. W. "Well, how come then that you're standing here, broke? But here, I've got business, I'll give you ten dollars—and remember, it's the last that you get!"

He drew out a bill, but Rimrock stood looking at him with a slow and contemptuous smile.

"Yes, you doggoned old screw," he answered ungraciously, "what good will ten dollars do?"

"You can get just as drunk on that," replied L. W. pointedly, "as you could on a hundred thousand!"

A change came over Rimrock's face, the swift mirroring of some great idea, and he reached out and grabbed the money.

"Where you going?" demanded L. W. as he started across the street.

"None of your business," answered Rimrock curtly, but he headed straight for the Mint.

CHAPTER II

When Riches Fly

THE Mint was Gunsight's only gambling house. It had a bar, of course, and a Mexican string band that played from eight o'clock on; besides a roulette wheel, a crap table, two faro layouts, and monte for the Mexicans. But the afternoon was dull and the faro dealer was idly shuffling a double stack of chips when Rimrock brushed in through the door. Half an hour afterwards the place was crowded and all the games were running big. Such is the force of example—especially when you win.

Rimrock threw his bill on the table, bought a stack of white chips, placed it on the queen and told the dealer to turn 'em. The queen won and Rimrock took his chips and played as the spirit moved. He won more, for the house was unlucky from the start, and soon others began to ride his bets. If he bet on the seven, eager hands reached over his shoulder and placed more chips on the seven. Petty winners drifted off to try their luck at monte, the sports took a flier at roulette; and as the gambling spirit, so subtly fed, began to rise to a fever, Rimrock Jones, the cause of all this heat, bet more and more—and still won.

It was at the height of the excitement when, with

half of the checks in the rack in front of him, Rimrock was losing and winning by turns, that the bull-like rumble of L. W. Lockhart came drifting in to him above the clamor of the crowd.

"Why don't you quit, you fool?" the deep voice demanded. "Cash in and quit—you've got your stake!"

Rimrock made a gesture of absent-minded impatience and watched the slow turn of the cards. Not even the dealer or the hawk-eyed lookout was more intently absorbed in the game. He knew every card that had been played and he bet where the odds were best. Every so often a long, yellow hand reached past him and laid a bet by his stake. It was the hand of a Chinaman, those most passionate of faro players, and at such times, seeing it follow his luck, the face of Rimrock lightened up with the semblance of a smile. He called the last turn and they paused for the drinks, while the dealer mopped his brow.

"Where's Ike?" he demanded. "Well, somebody call him—he's hiding out, asleep, upstairs."

"Yes, wake him up!" shouted Rimrock boastfully. "Tell him Rimrock Jones is here."

"Aw, pull out, you sucker!" blared L. W. in his ear, but Rimrock only shoved out his bets.

"Ten on the ace," droned the anxious dealer, "the jack is coppered. All down?"

He held up his hand and as the betting ceased he slowly pushed out the two cards.

"Tray loses, ace wins!" he announced and Rimrock won again.

Then he straightened up purposefully and looked about as he sorted his winnings into piles.

"The whole works on the queen," he said to the dealer and a hush fell upon the crowd.

"Where's Ike?" shrilled the dealer, but the boss was not to be found and he dealt, unwillingly, for a queen. But the fear was on him and his thin hands trembled; for Ike Bray was not the type of your frozen-faced gambler—he expected his dealers to win. The dealer shoved them out, and an oath slipped past his lips.

"Queen wins," he quavered, "the bank is broke." And he turned the box on its side.

A shout went up—the glad yell of the multitude—and Rimrock rose up grinning.

"Who said to pull out?" he demanded arrogantly, looking about for the glowering L. W. "Huh, huh!" he chuckled, "quit your luck when you're winning? Quit your luck and your luck will quit you—the drinks for the house, barkeep!"

He was standing at the bar, stuffing money into his pockets, when Ike Bray, the proprietor, appeared. Rimrock turned, all smiles, as he heard his voice on the stairs and lolled back against the bar. More than once in the past Bray had taken his roll but now it was his turn to laugh.

"Lemme see," he remarked as he felt Bray's eyes upon him, "I wonder how much I win."

He drew out the bills from his faded overalls and began laboriously to count them out into his hat.

Ike Bray stopped and looked at him, a little, twisted man with his hair still rumpled from the bed.

"Where's that dealer?" he shrilled in his high, complaining voice. "I'll kill the danged piker—that bank ain't broke yet—I got a big roll, right here!"

He waved it in the air and came limping forward until he stood facing Rimrock Jones.

"You think you broke me, do you?" he demanded insolently as Rimrock looked up from his count.

"You can see for yourself," answered Rimrock contentedly, and held out his well-filled hat.

"You're a piker!" yelled Bray. "You don't dare to come back at me. I'll play you one turn win or lose—for your pile!"

A hundred voices rang out at once, giving Rimrock all kinds of advice, but L. W.'s rose above them all.

"Don't you do it!" he roared. "He'll clean you, for a certainty!" But Rimrock's blue eyes were aflame.

"All right, Mr. Man," he answered on the instant, and went over and sat down in his chair. "But bring me a new pack and shuffle 'em clean, and I'll do the cutting myself."

"Ahhr!" snarled Bray, who was in villainous humor, as he hurled himself into his place. "Y'needn't make no cracks—I'm on the square—and I'll take no lip from anybody!"

"Well, shuffle 'em up then," answered Rimrock quietly, "and when I feel like it I'll make my bet."

It was the middle of the night, as Bray's days were divided, and even yet he was hardly awake; but he shuffled the cards until Rimrock was satisfied and then locked them into the box. The case-keeper sat opposite, to keep track of the cards, and a look-out on the stand at one end, and while a mob of surging onlookers fought at their backs they watched the slow turning of the cards.

"Why don't you bet?" snapped Bray; but Rimrock jerked his head and beckoned him to go on.

"Yes, and lose half on splits," he answered grimly, "I'll bet when it comes the last turn."

The deal went on till only three cards remained in the bottom of the box. By the record of the case-keeper they were the deuce and the jack—the top card, already shown, did not count.

"The jack," said Rimrock and piled up his money on the enameled card on the board.

"You lose," rasped out Bray without waiting for the turn and then drew off the upper card. The jack lay, a loser, in the box below and as he shoved it slowly out the deuce appeared underneath.

"How'd you know?" flashed back Rimrock as Bray reached for his money, but the gambler laughed in his face.

"I outlucked you, you yap," he answered harshly. "That dealer—he wasn't worth hell room!"

"Gimme a fiver to eat on!" demanded Rimrock as Bray banked the money, but he flipped him fifty cents. It was the customary stake, the sop thrown by the gambler to the man who has lost his last cent, and Bray sloughed it without losing his count.

"Go on, now," he said, still keeping to the formula, "go back and polish a drill!"

It was the form of dismissal for the hardrock miners whose earnings he was wont to take, but Rimrock was not particular.

"All right, Ike," he said and as he drifted out the door his prosperity friends disappeared. Only L. W. remained, a scornful twist to his lips, and the sight of him left Rimrock sick. "Yes, rub it in!" he said defiantly and L. W., too, walked away.

In his sober moments—when he was out on the desert or slugging away underground—Rimrock Jones was neither childish nor a fool. He was a serious man, with great hopes before him; and a past, not ignoble, behind. But after months of solitude, of hard, yegging work and hopes deferred, the town set his nerves all a-tingle—even Gunsight, a mere dot on the map—and he was drunk before he took his first drink. Drunk with mischief and spontaneous laughter, drunk with good stories untold, new ideas, great thoughts, high ambitions. But now he had had his fling.

With fifty cents to eat on, and one more faro game behind him, Rimrock stood thoughtfully on the corner

and asked the old question: What next? He had won, and he had lost. He had made the stake that would have taken him far towards his destiny; and then he had dropped it, foolishly, by playing another man's game. He could see it now; but then, we all can—the question was, what next?

"Well, I'll eat," he said at last and went across the street to Woo Chong's. "The American Restaurant" was the way the sign read, but Americans don't run restaurants in Arizona. They don't know how. Woo Chong had fed forty miners when he ran the cook-house for Rimrock, for half what a white man could; and when Rimrock had lost his mine, at the end of a long lawsuit, Woo Chong had followed him to town. There was a long tally on the wall, the longest of all, which told how many meals Rimrock owed him for; but Rimrock knew he was welcome. Adversity had its uses and he had learned, among other things, that his best friends were now Chinamen and Mexicans. To them, at least, he was still El Patron—the Boss!

"Hello there, Woo!" he shouted at the doorway and a rapid-fire of Chinese ceased. The dining-room was deserted, but from the kitchen in the rear he could hear the shuffling slippers of Woo.

"Howdy-do, Misse' Jones!" exclaimed Woo in great excitement as he came hurrying out to meet him. "I see you—few minutes ago—ove' Ike Blay's place! You blakum falo bank, no?"

"No, I lose," answered Rimrock honestly. "Ike Bray, he gave me this to eat on."

He showed the fifty-cent piece and sat down at a table whereat Woo Chong began to giggle hysterically.

"Aw! Allee time foolee me," he grinned facetiously. "You no see me the'? Me playum, too. Win ten dolla', you bet!"

"Well, all right, Woo," said Rimrock. "Just give me something to eat—we won't quarrel about who won."

He leaned back in his chair and Woo Chong said no more till he appeared again with a T-bone steak.

"You ketchum mine, pletty soon?" he questioned anxiously. "All lite, me come back and cook."

Rimrock sighed and went to eating and Woo remembered the coffee, but somehow even that failed to cheer.

A shadow of doubt came across Woo's watchful face and he hurried away for more bread.

"You no bleakum bank?" he enquired at last and Rimrock shook his head.

"No, Woo," he said, "Ike Bray, he came down and win all my money back."

"Aw, too bad!" breathed Woo Chong and slipped quietly away; but after a while he came back.

"Too bad!" he repeated. "You my fliend, Misse' Jones." And he laid five dollars by his hand.

"Ah, no, no!" protested Rimrock, rising up from his place as if he had suffered a blow. "No money, Woo.

You give me my grub and that's enough—I haven't got down to that!"

Woo Chong went away—he knew how to make gifts easy—and Rimrock stood looking at the gold. Then he picked it up, slowly, and as slowly walked out, and stood leaning against a post.

There is one street in Gunsight, running grandly down to the station; but the rest is mostly vacant lots and scattered adobe houses, creeping out into the infinitude of the desert. At noon, when he had come to town, the street was deserted, but now it was coming to life. Wild-eyed Mexican boys, mounted on bare-backed ponies, came galloping up from the corrals; freight wagons drifted past, hauling supplies to distant mining camps; and at last, as he stood there thinking, the women began to come out of the hotel.

All day they stayed there, idle, useless, on the shaded veranda above the street; and then, when the sun was low, they came forth like indolent butterflies to float up and down the street. They sauntered by in pairs, half-hidden beneath silk parasols, and their skirts swished softly as they passed. Rimrock eyed them sullenly, for a black mood was on him—he was thinking of his lost mine. Their faces were powdered to an unnatural whiteness and their hair was elaborately coiffed; their dresses, too, were white and filmy and their high heels clacked as they walked. But who was keeping these women, these wives of officials, and superintendents and mining engineers? Did they

glance at the man who had discovered their mine and built up the town where they lived? Well, probably they did, but not so as he could notice it and take off his battered old hat.

Rimrock looked up the road and, far out across the desert, he could see his own pack-train, coming in. There was money to be got, to buy powder and grub, but who would trust Rimrock Jones now? Not the Gunsight crowd, not McBain and his hirelings—they needed the money for their women! He gazed at them scowling as they went pacing by him, with their eyes fixed demurely on space; and all too well he knew that, beneath their lashes, they watched him and knew him well. Yes, and spoke to each other, when they were off up the street, of what a bum he had become. That was women—he knew it—the idle kind; they judged a man by his roll.

The pack-train strung by, each burro with its sawhorse saddle, and old Juan and his boy behind.

"Al corral!" directed Rimrock as they looked at him expectantly, and then he remembered something.

"Oyez, Juan," he beckoned, calling his man servant up to him, "here's five dollars—go buy some beans and flour. It is nothing, Juanito, I'll have more pretty soon—and here's four bits, you can buy you a drink."

He smiled benevolently and Juan touched his hat and went sidling off like a crab and then once more the black devil came back to plague him, hissing Money, *Money,* MONEY! He looked up the street

and a plan, long formless, took sudden shape in his brain. There was yet McBain, the horse-leech of a lawyer who had beaten him out of his claim. More than once, in black moments, he had threatened to kill him; but now he was glad he had not. Men even raised skunks, when the bounty on them was high enough, and took the pay out of their hides. It was the same with McBain. If he didn't come through—Rimrock shook up his six-shooter and stalked resolutely off up the street.

The office of the Company was on the ground floor of the hotel—the corner room, with a rented office beyond—and as Rimrock came towards it he saw a small sign, jutting out from the farther door:

MARY ROGET FORTUNE
TYPEWRITING.

He glanced at it absently, for strange emotions came over him as he peered in through that plateglass window. It had been his office, this same expensive room; and he had been robbed of it, under cover of the law. He shaded his eyes from the glare of the street and looked in at the mahogany desk. It was vacant—the whole place was vacant—and silently he tried the door. That was locked. McBain had seen him and slipped away till he should get out of town.

"The sneaking cur!" muttered Rimrock in a fury and a passing woman drew away and half-screamed.

He ignored her, pondering darkly, and then to his ears there came a familiar voice. He listened, intently, and raised his head; then tiptoed along the wall. That voice, and he knew it, belonged to Andrew McBain, the man that stole mines for a living. He paused at the door where Mary Fortune had her sign, then suddenly forced his way in.

Without thinking, impulsively, he had moved towards that voice as a man follows some irresistible call. He opened the door and stood blinking in the doorway, his hand on the pistol at his side. Then he blinked again, for in the gloom of the back office there was nothing but a desk and a girl. She wore a harness over her head, like a telephone operator, and rose up to meet him tremulously.

"Is there anything you wish?" she asked him quietly and Rimrock fumbled and took off his hat.

"Yes—I was looking for a man," he said at last. "I thought I heard him—just now."

He came down towards her, still looking about him, and there was a stir from behind the desk.

"No, I think you're mistaken," she answered bravely, but he could see the telltale fear in her eyes.

"You know who I mean!" he broke out roughly, "and I guess you know why I've come!"

"No, I don't," she answered, "but—but this is my office and I hope you won't make any trouble."

The words came with a rush, once she found her courage, but the appeal was lost upon Rimrock.

"He's here, then!" he said. "Well, you tell him to come out. I'd like to talk with him on business—alone!"

He took a step forward and then suddenly from behind the desk a shadow rose up and fled. It was Andrew McBain, and as he dashed for the rear door the girl valiantly covered his retreat. There was a quick slap of the latch, a scuffle behind her, and the door came shut with a bang.

"Oho!" said Rimrock as she faced him panting, "he must be a friend of yourn."

"No, he isn't," she answered instantly, and then a smile crept into her eyes. "But he's—well, he's my principal customer."

"Oh," said Rimrock grimly, "well, I'll let him live then. Good-bye."

He turned away, still intent on his purpose, but at the door she called him back.

"What's that?" he asked as if awakened from a dream. "Why, yes, if you don't mind, I will."

CHAPTER III

Miss Fortune

IT was very informal, to say the least, for Mary Fortune to invite him to stay. To be sure, she knew him—he was the man with the gun, the man of whom McBain was afraid—but that was all the more reason, to a reasoning woman, why she should keep silent and let him depart. But there was a business-like brevity about him, a single-minded directness, that struck her as really unique. Quite apart from the fact that it might save McBain, she wanted him to stay there and talk. At least so she explained it, the evening afterwards, to her censorious other-self. What she did was spontaneous, on the impulse of the moment, and without any reason whatever.

"Oh, won't you sit down a moment?" she had murmured politely; and the savage, fascinating Westerner, after one long look, had with equal politeness accepted.

"Yes, indeed," he answered when he had got his wits together, "you're very kind to ask me, I'm sure."

He came back then, a huge, brown, ragged animal and sat down, very carefully, in her spare chair. Why he did so when his business, not to mention a just

revenge, was urgently calling him thence, was a question never raised by Rimrock Jones. Perhaps he was surprised beyond the point of resistance; but it is still more likely that, without his knowing it, he was hungry to hear a woman's voice. His black mood left him, he forgot what he had come there for, and sat down to wonder and admire.

He looked at her curiously, and his eyes for one brief moment took in the details of the headband over her ear; then he smiled to himself in his masterful way as if the sight of her pleased him well. There was nothing about her to remind him of those women who stalked up and down the street; she was tall and slim with swift, capable hands, and every line of her spoke subtly of style. Nor was she lacking in those qualities of beauty which we have come to associate with her craft. She had quiet brown eyes that lit up when she smiled, a high nose and masses of hair. But across that brown hair that a duchess might have envied lay the metal clip of her ear-'phone, and in her dark eyes, bright and steady as they were, was that anxious look of the deaf.

"I hope I wasn't rude," she stammered nervously as she sat down and met his glance.

"Oh, no," he said with the same carefree directness, "it was me, I reckon, that was rude. I certainly didn't count on meeting a lady when I came in here looking for—well, McBain. He won't be back, I reckon. Kind of interferes with business, don't it?"

He paused and glanced at the rear door and the typist smiled, discreetly.

"Oh, no," she said. And then, lowering her voice: "Have you had trouble with Mr. McBain?"

"Yes, I have," he answered. "You may have heard of me—my name is Henry Jones."

"Oh—*Rimrock* Jones?"

Her eyes brightened instantly as he slowly nodded his head.

"That's me," he said. "I used to run this whole town—I'm the man that discovered the mines."

"What, the Gunsight mines? Why, I thought Mr. McBain——"

"McBain *what?*"

"Why, I thought *he* discovered the mines."

Rimrock straightened up angrily, then he sat back in his chair and shook his head at her cynically.

"He didn't need to," he answered. "All he had to do was to discover an error in the way I laid out my claim. Then he went before a judge that was as crooked as he was and the rest you can see for yourself."

He thrust his thumb scornfully through a hole in his shirt and waved a hand in the direction of the office.

"No, he cleaned me out, using a friend of mine; and now I'm down to nothing. What do you think of a law that will take away a man's mine because it apexes on another man's claim? I discovered this

mine and I formed the company, keeping fifty-one per cent. of the stock. I opened her up and she was paying big, when Andy McBain comes along. A shyster lawyer—that's the best you can say for him—but he cleaned me, down to a cent."

"I don't understand," she said at last as he seemed to expect some reply. "About these apexes—what are they, anyway? I've only been West a few months."

"Well, I've been West all my life, and I've hired some smart lawyers, and I don't know what an apex is yet. But in a general way it's the high point of an ore-body—the highest place where it shows above ground. But the law works out like this: every time a man finds a mine and opens it up till it pays these apex sharps locate the high ground above him and contest the title to his claim. You can't do that in Mexico, nor in Canada, nor in China—this is the only country in the world where a mining claim don't go straight down. But under the law, when you locate a lode, you can follow that vein, within an extension of your end-lines, under anybody's ground. *Anybody's!*"

He shifted his chair a little closer and fixed her with his fighting blue eyes.

"Now, just to show you how it works," he went on, "take me, for instance. I was just an ordinary ranch kid, brought up so far back in the mountains that the boys all called me Rimrock, and I found a rich ledge of rock. I staked out a claim for myself, and the

rest for my folks and my friends, and then we organized the Gunsight Mining Company. That's the way we all do, out here—one man don't hog it all, he does something for his friends. Well, the mine paid big, and if I didn't manage it just right I certainly never meant any harm. Of course I spent lots of money—some objected to that—but I made the old Gunsight pay.

"Then—" he raised his finger and held it up impressively as he marked the moment of his downfall —"then this McBain came along and edged into the Company and right from that day, I lose. He took on as attorney, but it wasn't but a minute till he was trying to be the whole show. You can't stop that man, short of killing him dead, and I haven't got around to that yet. But he bucked me from the start and set everybody against me and finally he cut out Lon Lockhart. There was a man, by Joe, that I'd stake my life on it he'd never go back on a friend; but he threw in with this lawyer and brought a suit against me, and just naturally took—away—my—mine!"

Rimrock's breast was heaving with an excitement so powerful that the girl instinctively drew away; but he went on, scarcely noticing, and with a fixed glare in his eyes that was akin to the stare of a madman.

"Yes, took it away; and here's how they did it," he went on, suddenly striving to be calm. "The first man I staked for, after my father and kinfolks, was

L. W. Lockhart over here. He was a cowman then and he had some money and I figured on bidding him in. So I staked him a good claim, above mine on the mountain, and sure enough, he came into the Company. He financed me, from the start; but he kept this claim for himself without putting it in with the rest. Well, as luck would have it, when we sunk on the ledge, it turned at right angles up the hill. Up and down, she went—it was the main lode of quartz and we'd been following in on a stringer—and *rich?* Oh, my, it was rotten!"

He paused and smiled wanly, then his eyes became fixed again, and he hurried on with his tale.

"I was standing out in front of my office one day when Tuck Edwards, the boy I had in charge of the mine, came riding up and says:

" 'Rim, they've jumped you!'

" 'Who jumped me?' I says.

" 'Andrew McBain and L. W.!' he says and I thought at first he was crazy.

" 'Jumped our mine?' I says. 'How can they jump it when it's part their own already?'

" 'They've jumped it all,' he says. 'They had a mining expert out there for a week and he's made a report that the lode apexes on L. W.'s claim.'

"I couldn't believe it. L. W.? I'd made him. He used to be nothing but a cowman; and here he was in town, a banker. No, I couldn't believe it; and when I did it was too late. They'd taken possession

of the property and had a court order restraining me from going onto the grounds. Not only did they claim the mine, but every dollar it had produced, the mill, the hotel, everything! And the judge backed them up in it—what kind of a law is that?"

He leaned forward and looked her in the eyes and Mary Fortune realized that she was being addressed not as a woman, impersonally, but as a human being.

"What kind of a law is that?" he demanded sternly and took the answer for granted.

"That cured me," he said. "After this, here's the only law I know."

He tapped his pistol and leaned back in his chair, smiling grimly as she gazed at him, aghast.

"Yes, I know," he went on, "it don't sound very good, but it's that or lay down to McBain. The judges are no better—they're just promoted lawyers——"

He checked himself for she had risen from her chair and her eyes were no longer scared.

"Excuse me," she said, "my father was a judge." And Rimrock reached for his hat.

"Whereabouts?" he asked, groping for a chance to square himself.

"Oh—back East," she said evasively, and Rimrock heaved a sigh of relief.

"Aw, that's different," he answered. "I was just talking about the Territory. Well, say, I'll be moving along."

He rose quickly, but as he started for the door a

rifle-cartridge fell from his torn pocket. It rolled in a circle and as he stooped swiftly to catch it the bullet came out like a cork and let spill a thin yellow line.

"What's that?" she asked as he dropped to his knees; and he answered briefly:

"Gold!"

"What—real gold?" she cried rapturously, "gold from a mine? Oh, I'd like——"

She stopped short and Rimrock chuckled as he scooped up the elusive dust.

"All right," he said as he rose to his feet, "I'll make you a present of it, then," and held out the cartridge of gold.

"Oh, I couldn't!" she thrilled, but he only smiled encouragingly and poured out the gold in her hand.

"It's nothing," he said, "just the clean-up from a pocket. I run across a little once in a while."

A panic came over her as she felt the telltale weight of it, and she hastily poured it back.

"I can't take it, of course," she said with dignity, "but it was awful good of you to offer it, I'm sure."

"Aw, what do we care?" he protested lightly, but she handed the corked cartridge back. Then she stood off and looked at him and the huge man in overalls became suddenly a Crœsus in her eyes.

"Is that from your mine?" she asked at last and of a sudden his bronzed face lighted up.

"You bet it is—but look at this!" and he fetched

a polished rock from his pocket. "That's azurite," he said, "nearly forty per cent. copper! I'm not telling everybody, but I find big chunks of that, and I've got a whole mountain of low-grade. What's a gold mine compared to that?"

He gave her the rich rock with its peacock-blue coloring and plunged forthwith into a description of his find. Now at last he was himself and to his natural enthusiasm was added the stimulus of her spellbound, wondering eyes. He talked on and on, giving all the details, and she listened like one entranced. He told of his long trips across the desert, his discovery of the neglected mountain of low-grade copper ore; and then of his enthusiasm when in making a cut he encountered a pocket of the precious peacock-blue azurite. And then of his scheming and hiring American-born Mexicans to locate the whole body of ore, after which he engaged them to do the discovery work and later transfer the claims to him. And now, half-finished, with no money to pay them, and not even food to keep them content, the Mexicans had quit work and unless he brought back provisions all his claims would go by default.

"I've got a chance," he went on fiercely, "to make millions, if I can only get title to those claims! And now, by grab, after all I've done for 'em, these pikers won't advance me a cent!"

"How much would it cost?" she asked him quickly, "to finish the work and pay off the men?"

"Two thousand dollars," he answered wearily. "But it might as well be a million."

"Would—would four hundred dollars help you?"

She asked it eagerly, impulsively, almost in his ear, and he turned as if he had been struck.

"Don't speak so loud," she implored him nervously. "These women in the hotel—they're listening to everything you say. I can hear all right if you only whisper—would four hundred dollars help you out?"

"Not of your money!" answered Rimrock hoarsely. "No, by God, I'll never come to that!"

He started away, but she caught him by the arm and held him back till he stopped.

"But I want to do it!" she persisted. "It's a good thing—I believe in it—and I've got the money!"

He stopped and looked at her, almost tempted by her offer; then he shook his great head like a bull.

"No!" he said, talking half to himself. "I won't do it—I've sunk low enough. But a woman? Nope, I won't do it."

"Oh, quit your foolishness!" she burst out impatiently, "I guess I know my own mind. I came out to this country to try and recoup myself and I want to get in on this mine. No sentiment, understand me, I'm talking straight business; and I've got the money—right here!"

"Well, what do you want for it?" he demanded roughly. "If that's the deal. what's your cut? I

never saw you before, nor you me. How much do you want—if we win?"

"I want a share in the mine," she answered instantly. "I don't care—whatever you say!"

"Well, I'll go you," he said. "Now give me the money and I'll try to make both of us rich!"

His voice was trembling and he followed every movement as she stepped back behind her desk.

"Just look out the window," she said as he waited; and Rimrock turned his head. There was a rustle of skirts and a moment later she laid a roll of bills in his hand.

"Just give me a share," she said again and suddenly he met her eyes.

"How about fifty-fifty—an undivided half?" he asked with a dizzy smile.

"Too much," she said. "I'm talking business."

"All right," he said. "But so am I."

CHAPTER IV

As a Loan

RIMROCK JONES left town with four burro-loads of powder, some provisions and a cargo of tools. He paid cash for his purchases and answered no question beyond saying that he knew his own business. No one knew or could guess where he had got his money—except Miss Fortune, and she would not tell. From the very first she had told herself that the loan was nothing to hide, and yet she was too much of a woman not to have read aright the beacon in Rimrock's eyes. He had spoken impulsively, and so had she; and they had parted, as it turned out, for months.

The dove that had crooned so long in the umbrella tree built a nest there and cooed on to his mate. The clear, rainless winter gave place to spring and the giant cactus burst into flower. It rained, short and hard, and the desert floor took on suddenly a fine mat of green; and still he did not come. He was like the rain, this wild man of the desert; swift and fierce, then gone and forgotten. Once she saw his Mexican, the old, bearded Juan, with his string of shaggy burros at the store; but he brought her no word and went off the next day with more powder and provisions in his packs.

It was all new to Mary Fortune, this stern and barren country; and its people were new to her, too. The women, for some reason, had regarded her with suspicion and her answer was a patrician aloofness and reserve. When the day's work was done she took off her headband and sat reading in the lobby, alone. As for the men of the hotel, the susceptible young mining men who passed to and fro from Gunsight, they found her pleasant, but not quite what they had expected—not quite what Dame Rumor had painted her. They watched her from the distance, for she was undeniably goodlooking—and so did the women upstairs. They watched, and they listened, which was not the least of the reasons why Mary Fortune laid her ear-'phone aside. No person can enjoy the intimacies of life when they are shouted, ill-advisedly, to the world.

But if when she first came to town, worn and tired from her journey, she had seemed more deaf than she was, Mary Fortune had learned, as her hearing improved, to artfully conceal the fact. There was a certain advantage, in that unfriendly atmosphere, in being able to overhear chance remarks. But no permanent happiness can come from small talk, and listening to petty asides; and, for better or worse, Mary took off her harness and retired to the world of good books. She read and she dreamed and, quite unsuspected, she looked out the window for *him*.

The man! There is always a man, some man, for

every woman who dreams. Rimrock Jones had come once and gone as quickly, but his absence was rainbowed with romance. He was out on the desert, far away to the south, sinking shafts on his claims—their claims. He had discovered a fortune, but, strong as he was, he had had to accept help from her. He would succeed, this fierce, ungovernable desert-man; he would win the world's confidence as he had won her faith by his strength and the bold look in his eyes. He would finish his discovery work and record all his claims and then—well, then he would come back.

So she watched for him, furtively, glancing quickly out the window whenever a horseman passed by; and one day, behold, as she looked up from her typing, he was there, riding by on his horse! And as he passed he looked in, under the shadow of his hat, and touched a bag that was tied behind his saddle. He was more ragged than ever, and one hand had a bandage around it; but he was back, and he would come. She abandoned her typewriting—one of those interminable legal papers that McBain was always leaving on her desk—and stepped out to look down the street.

The air, warm and soft, was spiced with green odors and the resinous tang of the greasewood; the ground dove in his tree seemed swooning with passion as he crooned his throaty, *Kwoo, kwoo-o.* It was the breath of spring, but tropical, sense-stealing; it lulled the brain and bade the heart leap and thrill. This

vagabond, this rough horseman with his pistol and torn clothing and the round sack of ore lashed behind; who would ever dream that an adventurer like him could make her forget who she was? But he came from the mine she had helped him to save and the sack might be heavy with gold. So she watched, half-concealed, until he stopped at the bank and went striding in with the bag.

As for Rimrock Jones, he rode by the saloon and went direct to L. W., the banker. It was life or death, as far as the Tecolote was concerned, for his four hundred dollars was gone. That had given him the powder to shoot out his holes to the ten feet required by law, and enough actual cash to pay his Mexican locators and make a legal transfer of the claims; but four hundred dollars will not last a lifetime and Rimrock Jones was broke. He needed more money and he went perforce to the only man who could give it. It would be a fight, for L. W. was stubborn; but Rimrock was stubborn himself.

"L. W.," he said, when he found the banker in his private office in the rear, "you used to be white and I want you to listen before you spit out what you've got in your craw. You may have a grievance, and I don't deny it; but remember, I've got one, too. No, it isn't about my mine—I wouldn't sell you one share in it for your whole little jim-crow bank. I've done my first work and I've recorded my claims, and I'll offer them—somewhere's else. All you know is gold

and before we go any further, just run your eyes over that."

He dumped the contents of his bag on the polished desk and L. W. blinked as he looked. It was picked gold quartz of the richest kind, with jewelry specimens on top, and as L. W. ran his hand through it his tight mouth relaxed from its bulldog grip on the cigar.

"Where'd you get it?" he grunted and Rimrock's eyes flashed as he answered shortly:

"My mine."

"How much more you got?"

L. W. asked it suspiciously, but the gold-gleam had gone to his heart.

"About two tons of the best, scattered around on the different dumps, and a whole scad more that will ship. I knew you wouldn't lend on anything but gold-ore and I need money to pay off my Mexicans. I've got to save some ore bags to sack that picked rock in, and hire freighters to haul it in. Then there's the freight and the milling and with one thing and another I need about two thousand dollars."

"Oh! Two thousand dollars. Seems to me," observed L. W., "I've heard that sum mentioned before."

"You have, dad-burn ye, and this time I want it. What's the matter, ain't that ore good for it all?"

"It is, if you've got it, but I've come to the point where I don't place absolute confidence in your word."

Rimrock Jones left town with four burro-loads of powder, some provisions and a cargo of tools

"Oh, the hell you have!" said Rimrock sarcastically, "that sounds like some lawyer talk. You might've learned it from Apex McBain when you was associated with him in a deal. I wont say *what* deal, but, refreshing your memory now, ain't my word as good as yours?"

He gazed intently at the hard-visaged L. W. whose face slowly turned brick red.

"Now to get down to business," went on Rimrock quietly, "I tell you that ore is there. If you'll loan me the money to haul in that rock I'll pay you back from my check. And I'll give you my note at one per cent. a month, compounded monthly and all that. I guess a man that can show title to twenty claims that turn out picked ore like *that*—well, he's entitled, perhaps, to a little more consideration than you boys have been showing me of late."

L. W. sat silent, his burning eyes on the gold, the cigar clutched fiercely in his teeth—then without a word he wrote a check and threw it across the desk.

"Much obliged," said Rimrock and without further words he stepped out and cashed the check. And then Rimrock Jones disappeared.

The last person in Gunsight to hear what had happened was Mary Fortune. She worked at her desk that day in a fever of expectation, now stopping to wonder at the strange madness that possessed her, now pounding harder to still her tumultuous thoughts. She did not know what it was that she expected, only

something great and new and wonderful, something to lift her at last from the drudgery of her work and make her feel young and gay. Something to rouse her up to the wild joy of living and make her forget her misfortunes. To be poor, and deaf, and alone—all these were new things to Mary Fortune; but she was none of them when he was near. What need had she to hear when she could read in his eyes that instant admiration that a woman values most? And poor? The money she had given had helped him, perhaps, to gain millions!

She worked late, that afternoon; and again, in the evening, she made an excuse to keep her office lit up. Still he did not come and she paced up the street, even listened as she passed by the saloons—then, overwhelmed with shame that she had seemed to seek him, she fled to her room and wept. The next day, and the next, she watched and listened and at last she overheard the truth. It was Andrew McBain, the hard, fighting Scotchman, who told the dreadful news —and she hated him for it, always.

"Well, I'm glad he's gone," he had replied to L. W., who had beckoned him out to the door. "He's a dangerous man—I've been afraid of him—you're lucky to get off at that."

"Lucky!" yelled L. W., suddenly forgetting his caution, "he touched me for two thousand dollars! Do you call that lucky? And here's the latest—he hasn't got a pound of picked ore! Even took away

what he had; and that old, whiskered Mexican says he up and borrowed that from him!"

"That's a criminal act," explained McBain exultantly, as he signaled L. W. to be calm. "Shh, not so loud, the girl might hear you. Let him go, and hold it over his head."

"No, I'll kill the dastard!" howled L. W. rebelliously and slammed the door in a rage.

A swooning sickness came over Mary Fortune as she sat, waiting stonily, at her desk; but when McBain came back and sat down beside her she typed on, automatically, as he spoke. Then she woke at last, as if from a dream, to hear his harsh, discordant voice; and a sudden resentment, a fierce, passionate hatred, swept over her as he shouted in her ear. A hundred times she had informed him politely that she was not deaf when she wore her ear-'phone, and a hundred times he had listened impatiently and gone on in his sharp, rasping snarl. She drew away shuddering as he looked over some papers and cleared his throat for a fresh start; and then, without reason that he could ever divine, she burst into tears and fled.

She came back later, but the moment he began dictating she pushed back her chair and rose up.

"Mr. McBain," she said tremulously, "you don't need to shout at me. I give you notice—I shall leave on the first."

It was plainly a tantrum, such as he had observed in women, a case, pure and simple, of nerves; but

Andrew McBain let it pass. She could spell—a rare quality in typists—and was familiar with legal forms.

"Ah, my dear Miss Fortune," he began propitiatingly, "I hope you will reconsider, I'm sure. It's a habit I have, when dictating a brief, to speak as though addressing the court. Perhaps, under the circumstances, you could take off your instrument and my voice would be—ahem—just about right."

"No! It drives me crazy!" she cried in a passion. "It makes everybody think I'm so deaf!"

She broke down at that and McBain discreetly withdrew and was gone for the rest of the day. It was best, he had learned, when young women became emotional, to absent himself for a time. And the next day, sure enough, she came back, smiling cheerfully, and said no more of leaving her job. She was, in fact, more obliging than before and he judged that the tantrum had passed.

With L. W., however, the case was different. He claimed to be an Indian in his hates; and a mining engineer, dropping in from New York, told a story that staggered belief. Rimrock Jones was there, the talk of the town, reputed to be enormously rich. He smoked fifty-cent cigars, wore an enormous black hat and put up at the Waldorf Hotel. Not only that but he was in all the papers as associating with the kings of finance. So great was his prestige that the engineer, in fact, had been requested to report on his mine.

"A report?" shouted L. W., "what, a report on

the Tecolotes? Well, I can save you a long, dusty trip. In the first place Rimrock Jones is a thoroughpaced scoundrel, not only a liar but a crook; and in the second place these claims are forty miles across the desert with just two sunk wells on the road. I wouldn't own his mines if you would make me a present of them and a million dollars to boot. I wouldn't take them for a gift if that mountain was pure gold—how's he going to haul the ore to the railroad? Now listen, my friend, I've known that boy since he stood knee-high to a toad and of all the liars in Arizona he stands out, preëminently, as the worst."

"You question his veracity, then?" enquired the engineer as he fumbled for some papers in his coat.

"Question nothing!" raved L. W. "I'm making a statement! He's not only a liar—he's a thief! He robbed me, the dastard; he got two thousand dollars of my money without giving me the scratch of a pen. Oh, I tell you——"

"Well, that's curious," broke in the engineer as he stared at a paper, "he's got your name down here as a reference."

CHAPTER V

The Prodigal's Return

IT is an engineer's duty, when he is sent out to examine a mine, to make a report on the property, regardless. The fact that the owner is a liar and a thief does not necessarily invalidate his claims; and an all-wise Providence has, on several occasions, allowed such creatures to discover bonanzas. So the engineer hired a team and disappeared on the horizon and L. W. went off buying cattle.

A month passed by in which the derelictions of Rimrock were capped by the machinations of a rival cattle buyer, who beat L. W. out of a buy that would have netted him up into the thousands. Disgusted with everything, L. W. boarded the west-bound at Bowie Junction and flung himself into a seat in the half-empty smoker without looking to the right or left. He was mad—mad clear through—and the last of his cigars was mashed to a pulp in his vest. He had just made this discovery when another cigar was thrust under his nose and a familiar voice said:

"Try one of mine!"

L. W. looked at the cigar, which was undoubtedly expensive, and then glanced hastily across the aisle. There, smiling sociably, was Rimrock Jones.

L. W. squinted his eyes. Yes, Rimrock Jones, in a large, black hat; a checked suit, rather loud, and high boots. His legs were crossed and with an air of elegant enjoyment he was smoking a similar cigar.

"Don't want it!" snarled L. W. and, rising up in a fury, he moved off towards the far end of the car.

"Oh, all right," observed Rimrock, "I'll smoke it myself, then." And L. W. grunted contemptuously.

They rode for some hours across a flat, joyless country without either man making a move, but as the train neared Gunsight Rimrock rose up and went forward to where L. W. sat.

"Well, what're you all bowed up about?" he enquired bluffly. "Has your girl gone back on you, or what?"

"Go on away!" answered L. W. dangerously, "I don't want to talk to you, you thief!"

"Oh, that's what's the matter with you—you're thinking about the money, eh? Well, you always did hate to lose."

An insulting epithet burst from L. W.'s set lips, but Rimrock let it pass.

"Oh, that's all right," he said. "Never mind my feelings. Say, how much do you figure I owe you?"

"You don't owe me nothing!" cried L. W. half-rising. "You *stole* from me, you scoundrel—I can put you in the Pen for this!"

"Aw, you wouldn't do that," answered Rimrock easily. "I know you too well for that."

"Say, you go away," panted L. W. in a frenzy, "or I'll throw you out of this car."

"No you won't either," said Rimrock truculently. "You'll have to eat some more beans before you can put *me* on my back."

Rimrock squared his great shoulders and his eyes sparkled dangerously as he faced L. W. in the aisle.

"Now listen!" he went on after a tense moment of silence, "what's the use of making a row? I know I lied to you—I had to do it in order to get the money. I just framed that on purpose so I could get back to New York where a proposition like mine would be appreciated. I was a bum, in Gunsight; but back in New York, where they think in millions, they treated me like a king."

"I don't want to talk to you," rumbled L. W. moving off, "you lied once too often, and I've *quit* ye!"

"All right!" answered Rimrock, "that suits me, too. All I ask is—what's the damage?"

"Thirty-seven hundred and fifty-five dollars," snapped back L. W. venomously, "and I'd sell out for thirty-seven cents."

"You won't have to," said Rimrock with business directness and flashed a great roll of bills.

"There's four thousand," he said, peeling off four bills, "you can keep the change for *pilon.*"

There was one thing about L. W., he was a poker player of renown and accustomed to thinking quick.

He took one look at that roll of bills and waved the money away.

"Nope! Keep it!" he said. "I don't want your money—just let me in on this deal."

"Huh!" grunted Rimrock, "for four thousand dollars? You must think I've been played for a sucker. No, four hundred thousand dollars wouldn't give you a look-in on the pot that I've opened this trip."

"W'y, you lucky fool!" exclaimed L. W. incredulously, his eyes still glued to the roll. "What's the proposition, Rimmy? Say, you know me, Rim!"

"Yeh! Sure I do!" answered Rimrock dryly, and L. W. turned from bronze to a dull red. "I know the whole bunch of you, from the dog robber up, and this time I play my own hand. I was a sucker once, but the only friends I've got now are the ones that stayed with me when I was down."

"But *I* helped you, Rim!" cried L. W. appealingly. "Didn't I lend you money, time and again?"

"Yes, and here it is," replied Rimrock indifferently as he held out the four yellow bills. "You loaned me money, but you treated me like dirt—now take it or I'll ram it down your throat."

L. W. took the money and stood gnawing his cigar as the train slowed down for Gunsight.

"Say, come over to the bank—I want to speak to you," he said as they dropped off the train.

"Nope, can't stop," answered Rimrock curtly, "got to go and see my friends."

He strode off down the street and L. W. followed after him, beckoning feverishly to every one he met.

"Say, Rimrock's struck it rich!" he announced behind his hand and the procession fell in behind.

Straight down the street Rimrock went to the Alamo where old Hassayamp stood shading his eyes, and while the crowd gathered around them he took Hassayamp's hand and shook it again and again.

"Here's the best man in town," he began with great feeling. "An old-time Arizona sport. There never was a time, when I was down and out, that my word wasn't good for the drinks."

And Hassayamp Hicks, divining some great piece of good fortune, invited him in for one more.

"Here's to Rimrock Jones," he said to the crowd, "the livest boy in this town."

They drank and then Rimrock drew out his roll and peeled off an impressive yellow bill.

"Just take out what I owe you," he said to old Hassayamp, "and let the boys drink up the rest."

With that he was gone and the crowd, scarce believing, stayed behind and drank to his health. Not a word was said by Rimrock or his friends as to the source of this sudden wealth. For once in his life Rimrock Jones was reticent, but the roll of bills spoke for itself. He came out of Woo Chong's restaurant with a broad grin on his face and looked about for the next man he owed.

"You can talk all you want to," he observed to the onlookers, "but a Chink is as white as they make 'em. And any man in this crowd," he added impressively, "that ever loaned me a cent, all he has to do is to step out and say so and he gets his money back—and then some."

The crowd surged about, but no one stepped forward. Strange stories were in the air, resurrected from the past, of Rimrock and the way he paid. When the Gunsight mine, after many difficulties, began to pay back what it had cost, Rimrock had appeared on the street with a roll. And then, as now, he had announced his willingness to pay any bill, good or bad, that he owed. He stood there waiting, with the bills in his hand, and he paid every man who applied. He even paid men who slipped in meanly with stories of loans when he was drunk; but he noted them well and from that day forward they received no favors from him.

"Ah, there's the very man I'm looking for," exclaimed Rimrock in Spanish as he spied old Juan in the crowd and, striding forward, he held out his hand and greeted him ceremoniously. Old Juan it was of whom he had borrowed the gold ore that had coaxed the two thousand dollars from L. W.—and he had never sent the picked rock back.

"How are you, Juan?" he enquired politely in the formula that all Mexicans love. "And your wife, Rosita? Is she well also? Yes, thank God, I am

well, myself. Where is Rico now? He is a good boy, truly—will you do one more thing for me, Juan?"

"Sí, Sí, Señor!" answered Juan deferentially; and Rimrock smiled as he patted his shoulder.

"You are a good man, Juan," he said. "A' good friend of mine—I will remember it. Now get me an ore-sack—a strong one—like the one that contained the picked gold."

"Un momento!" smiled Juan hurrying off towards the store and the Mexicans began to swarm to and fro. Some reward, they knew, was to be given to Juan to compensate him for the loss of his gold. His gold and his labor and all the unpaid debt that was owing to him and his son and the rest. The streets began to clatter with flying hoofs as they rode off to summon el pueblo, and by the time Old Juan returned with his sack all Mexican town was there.

"Muy bien," pronounced Rimrock as he inspected the ore-sack, "now come with me, Amigo!"

Amigo Juan went, and all his friends after him, to see what El Patron would do. Something generous and magnificent, they knew very well, for El Patron was gentleman, muy caballero. He led the way to the bank, still enquiring most solicitously about Juan's relations, his children, his burros and so on; and Juan, sweating like a packed jack under the stress of the excitement, answered courteously, as one should to El Patron, and clung eagerly to his sack. The crowd

entered the bank and as L. W. came out Rimrock placed Juan's sack on the table.

"Bring out new silver dollars, fresh from the mint," he said, "and fill up this sack for Juan!"

"Santa Maria!" exclaimed Juan fervently as the cashier came staggering forth with a sack, and Rimrock took the bag, containing a thousand bulging dollars, and set it down before him. He broke the seal and as the shining silver burst forth he spilled it in a huge windrow on the table.

"Now fill up your ore-sack," he said to Juan, "and all you can stuff into it is yours."

"For a gift?" faltered Juan, and as Rimrock nodded he buried his hands in the coin. The dollars clanged and rattled as they spilled on the table and a great silence came over the crowd. They gazed at Old Juan as if he were an Aladdin, or Ali Baba in his treasure-cave. Old, gray-bearded Juan who hauled wood for a living, or packed cargas on his burros for El Patron! Yes, here he was with his fists full of dollars, piling them faster and faster into his bag.

"Now shake the bag down," suggested El Patron, "and perhaps you can get in some more."

"Some more?" panted Juan and quite mad with great riches he stuffed the sack to the top.

"Very well," said Rimrock, "now take them home, and give part of the money to Rosita. Then take what is left in this other bag and give a fiesta to the boys who worked for me."

"Make way!" cried Juan and as the crowd parted before him he went staggering down the street. A few shiny dollars heaped high on the top, fell off and were picked up by his friends. They went off together, Old Juan and his *amigos,* and L. W. came over to Rimrock.

"Now listen to me, Henry Jones," he began; but Rimrock waved him away.

"I don't need to," he said, "I know what you'll say—but Juan there has been my friend."

"Well, you don't need to spoil him—to break his back with money—when ten dollars will do just as well."

"Yes, I do!" said Rimrock, "didn't I borrow his picked rock? Well, keep out then; I know my friends. He'll be drunk for a month and at the end of his fiesta he won't have a dollar to his name, but as long as he lives he can tell the other hombres about that big sack of money he had."

Rimrock laid down one big bill, which paid for all the dollars, and walked out of the bank on air. He was feeling rich—that wealthy feeling that penny-pinchers never know—and all the world, except L. W. Lockhart, seemed responsive to his smile. Men who had shunned him for years now shook his hand and refused to take back what they had lent. They even claimed they had forgotten all about it or had intended their loans as stakes. With his pockets full of money it was suddenly impossible for Rimrock to spend a

dollar. In the Alamo Saloon, where his friends were all gathered in a determined assault on the bar, his popularity was so intense that the drinks fairly jumped at him and he slipped out the back way to escape. There was one duty more—both a duty and a pleasure—and he headed for the Gunsight Hotel.

The news of his success, whatever it was, had preceded him hours before. Andrew McBain had hid out, the idle women were all a-twitter; but Mary Roget Fortune was calm. She had heard the news from the very first moment, when L. W. had dropped in on McBain; but the more she heard of his riotous prodigality the more it left her cold. His return to town reminded her painfully of that other time when he had come. She had watched for him then, her knight from the desert, worn and ragged but with his sack full of gold; but he had passed her by without a word, and now she did not care.

She looked up sharply as he came at last, a huge form, half-blocking the door; and Rimrock noticed the change. Perhaps his sudden popularity had made him unduly sensitive—he felt instinctively that she did not approve.

"Do you mind my cigar?" he asked, stopping awkwardly half way to her desk; and he suddenly came to life as she answered:

"Why, yes. Since you ask me, I do."

That was straight enough and Rimrock cast his fifty-cent cigar like a stogie out of the door. Then

he came back towards her with his big head thrust out and a searching look in his eyes. She had greeted him politely, but it was not the manner of the girl he had expected to see. Somehow, without knowing why, he had expected her to meet him with a different look in her eyes. It had been there before, but now it was absent—a look that he liked very much. In fact, he had remembered it and thought, apropos of nothing, that it was a pity she was so deaf. He looked again and smiled very slightly. But no, the look had fled.

CHAPTER VI

Rimrock Passes

IN the big moments of life when we have triumphed over difficulties and quaffed the heady wine of success there is always something—or the lack of something—to bring us back to earth. Rimrock Jones had returned in a Christmas spirit and had taken Gunsight by storm. He had rewarded his friends and rebuked his enemies and all those who grind down the poor. He had humbled L. W. and driven McBain into hiding; and now this girl, this deaf, friendless typist, had snatched the cup from his lips. The neatly turned speech—the few well-chosen words in which he had intended to express his appreciation for her help—were effaced from his memory and in their place there came a doubt, a dim questioning of his own worth. What had he done, or neglected to do, that had taken that look from her eyes? He sank down in a chair and regarded her intently as she sat there, composed and still.

"Well, it's been quite a while," he said at last, "since I've been round to see you."

"Yes, it has," she replied and the way she said it raised a more poignant question in his mind. Was she miffed, perhaps, because he had failed to call on

her, that time when he came back to town? He had borrowed her money—she might have been worried, that time when he went to New York.

"I just got in, a little while ago—been back to New York about my mine. Well, it's doing all right now and I've come around to see you and pay back that money I owe."

"Oh, that four hundred dollars? Why, I don't want it back. You were to give me a share in your mine."

Rimrock stopped with his roll half out of his pocket and gazed at her like a man struck dumb. A share in his mine! He put the money back and mopped the sudden sweat from his brow.

"Well, now say," he began, "I've made other arrangements. I've sold a big share already. But I'll give you the money, it'll come to the same thing!" He whipped out his roll and smiled at her hopefully but she drew back and shook her head.

"No," she said, "I don't want your money. I want a share in that mine."

She faced him, determined, and Rimrock went weak for he remembered that she had his word. He had given his word and unless she excused him he would have to make it good. And if he did—well, right there he would lose control of his mine.

"Say, now listen a minute," he began mysteriously, "I'm not telling this on the street——"

"Well, don't tell it here, then," she interrupted hastily, "they're listening, most of the time."

She pointed towards the door that led to the hotel lobby and Rimrock tiptoed towards it. He was just in time, as he snatched it open, to see McBain bounding up the back stairs; and a woman in a rocker, after a guilty stare, rose up and moved hastily away.

"Well, well," observed Rimrock as he banged the door. "I don't know which is worse, these women or peeping Andrew McBain. Are you still working for that fellow?" he enquired confidentially as he sat down and spoke low in her 'phone; and for the first time that day the smile came back and dwelt for a moment in her eyes.

"Yes," she answered, "I still do his work for him. What's the matter—don't you fully approve?"

Her gaze was a challenge and he let it pass with a grin and a jerk of the head.

"Just sorry for you," he said. "You'd better take this money and get a job with a man that's half white."

He drew out his roll and counted out four thousand dollars and laid them before her on the desk.

"Now listen," he began. "That four hundred then was worth four thousand to me now. I had to have it, and I sure appreciate it—now just accept that as a payment in part."

He pushed over the money, but she shook her head and met his gaze with resolute eyes.

"Not much," she said, "I don't want your money and, what's more, I won't accept it. I gave you four

hundred dollars—all the money I had—to get me a share in that mine, and now I want it. I don't care how much, but I want a share in that mine."

Rimrock shoved back his chair and once more the sweat appeared on his troubled brow. He rose up softly and peeped out the door, then came back and sat very close.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "Has some one been telling you who I've got in with me on this deal? Well, what's the matter then? Why won't you take the money? I'll give you more than you could get for the stock."

"No, all my life it's been my ambition to own a share in a mine. That's why I gave you the last of my money—I had confidence in your mine from the start."

"Well, what did you think, then?" enquired Rimrock sardonically, "when I jumped out of town without seeing you? You'd have sold out cheap, if I'd've come to you then, but now everybody knows I've won."

"Never mind what I thought," she answered darkly, "I took a chance, and I won."

"Say, you're strictly business, now ain't you?" observed Rimrock and muttered under his breath. "How much of a share do you expect me to give you?" he asked after a long anxious pause and her eyes lit up and were veiled.

"Whatever you say," she answered quietly and then:

"I believe you mentioned fifty-fifty—an undivided half."

"My—God!" exclaimed Rimrock starting wildly to his feet. "You don't—say, you didn't think I meant that?"

"Why, no," she said with a faint flicker of venom, "I didn't, to tell you the truth. That's why I told you I was talking business; but you said: 'Well, so am I.'"

"Well, holy Jehosophrats!" cursed Rimrock to himself and turned to look her straight in the eyes.

"Now let's get down to business," he went on sternly, "what do you want, and where am I at?"

"I want a share in that mine," she answered evenly, "whatever you think is right."

"Oh, that's the deal! You don't want fifty-fifty? You leave what it is to me?"

"That's what I said from the very first. And as for fifty-fifty—no, certainly I do not."

There were tears, half of anger, gathering back in her eyes, but Rimrock took no thought of that.

"Oh, you don't like my style, eh?" he came back resentfully. "All you want out of me is my money."

"No, I don't!" she retorted. "I don't want your money! I want a share in that mine!"

"Say, who are you, anyway?" burst out Rimrock explosively. "Are you some wise one that's on the inside?"

"That's none of your business," she answered

sharply, "you were satisfied when you took all my money."

"That's right," agreed Rimrock rubbing his jaw reflectively, "that's right, it was no questions asked. Now, say, I'm excited—I ought not to talk that way —I want to explain to you just how I'm fixed. I went back to New York and organized a company and gave one man forty-nine per cent. of my stock. He puts up the money and I put up the mine—and run it, absolutely. If I give you any stock I lose control of my mine; so I'm going to ask you to let me off."

He drew out his roll—that banded sheaf of yellow notes that he loved so dearly to flash—and began slowly to count off the bills.

"When you think it's enough," he went on ponderously, "you can say so, but I need all that stock."

He laid out the bills, one after another, and the girl settled back in her chair. "That's ten," he observed, "these are thousand-dollar bills—well, there's twelve, then—I'll make it thirteen." He glanced up expectantly, but she gave no sign and Rimrock dealt impassively on. "Well, fourteen—lots of money. Say, how much do you want? Fifteen thousand—you only gave me four hundred. Sixteen, seventeen—well, you get the whole roll; but say, girl, I can't give you that stock."

He threw down the last bill and faced her appealingly, but she answered with a hard little laugh.

"You've got to," she said. "I don't want your money. I want one per cent. of your stock."

"What, of what I've got left? Oh, of the whole capital stock! Well, that only leaves me fifty per cent."

"That's one way of looking at it. Now look at it another way. Don't you think I'm entitled to that? Don't you think if I'd said when I gave you that money: 'All I want is one per cent. of your mine'—don't you think now, honestly, that you'd have said: 'All right!' and agreed to it on the spot?"

She looked at him squarely and the fair-fighting Rimrock had to agree, though reluctantly, that she was right.

"Well, now that you've won when nobody expected you to, now that you've got money enough to get the whole town drunk, is that any reason why you should come to a poor typist and ask her to give up her rights? I'm putting it frankly and unless you can answer me I want you to give me that stock."

"Well, all right, I'll do it," answered Rimrock impulsively. "I promised you, and that's enough. But you've got to agree not to sell that stock—and to vote it with me, every time."

"Very well," she said, "I'll agree not to sell it—at least not to any one but you. And as far as the voting goes, I think we can arrange that; I'll vote for whatever seems right."

"No, right or wrong!" challenged Rimrock instantly. "I'm not going to be beat out of my mine!"

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "I hope you don't think——"

"Never mind what I think," answered Rimrock grimly, "I got bit once, and that's enough. I lost the old Gunsight just by trusting my friends, and this time I'm not trusting anybody."

"Oh, you're one of these cynics, these worldly-wise fellows that have lost all their faith in mankind? I've seen them before, but it wasn't much trouble to find somebody else that *they'd* wronged!"

She said the words bitterly with a lash to her tongue that cut Rimrock Jones to the quick. It had always been his boast that there was no man or woman that could claim he had done them a wrong, and he answered back sharply, while the anger was upon him, that he was not and there was no such thing.

"Well, if that's the case, then," she suggested delicately but with a touch of malice in her smile, "it seems rather personal to begin now with me, and take away my right to vote. Did this man in New York, when he bought into your company, agree to vote with you, right or wrong? Well then, why should I? Wasn't my money just as necessary, when I gave it to you, as his was when he gave it, later?"

"Oh—" Rimrock choked back an oath and then fell back on personalities to refute her maddening logic.

"Say, your father was a judge," he burst out insultingly. "Was he a promoted lawyer, too; or did you learn that line of talk from McBain?"

"Never mind about that. You haven't answered my question. Wasn't my money just as necessary as his? It was! Yes, you know it. Well, then, why should you choose me for the very first person that you ever intentionally wronged?"

"Well, by grab," moaned Rimrock, slumping down in his chair as he saw his last argument gone, "it was a black day for me when I took that four hundred from you. I'd have done a heap better to have held up some Chinaman or made old L. W. come through. And to be trimmed by a woman! Well, gimme your paper and I'll sign whatever you write!"

She drew in her lips and gazed at him resentfully; then, sitting down at her typewriter, she thought for a minute and rattled off a single sentence. Rimrock took the paper and signed it blindly, then stopped and read what it was.

"I, Henry (Rimrock) Jones, for value received, hereby agree to give to Mary Roget Fortune, one per cent. of the total capital stock of the Tecolote Mining Company."

"Yes, all right," he said. "You'll get your stock just as soon as I get it from the East. And now I hope, by the Lord, you're satisfied."

"Yes, I am," she answered and smiled cryptically.

"Well, I pass!" he exploded and, struggling to his feet, he lurched out upon the street.

CHAPTER VII

But Comes Back for More

FROM the highest pinnacle of success to the black depths of despair is a long way to drop in one hour and if Rimrock Jones went the way of all flesh it is only another argument for prohibition. All the rest of the town had got a good start before he appeared on the scene and to drown that black thought—defeated by a woman—he drank deep with the crowd at the Alamo. At the end of the bout when, his thoughts coming haphazard, he philosophized on the disasters of the day, his brain slipped a cog and brought two ideas together that piled Pelion on the Ossa of his discontent.

The first vision to rise was that of the lady typist, exacting her full pound of flesh; and then, groping back to that other catastrophe, his mind fetched up—Andrew McBain! And then he remembered. She worked for McBain. He straightened up in the barroom chair and gusty curses swept from his lips.

"You're stung, you sucker!" he cried in a fury. "You're sold out to Andrew McBain! Oh, you dadburned idiot—you ignorant baboon—you were drunk, that's why you signed up!"

Rimrock's pitiful rage at that other personality that

had marred his fair hopes in his mine—that perverse, impulsive, overweening inner spirit that took the helm at each crisis of his life—was a rage to make the gods above weep if they did not laugh at the jest. And this blind, drunken self that rose up within him to sit leeringly in judgment on his acts, it judged not so ill, if the truth must be spoken. He had gone to Mary Fortune with the bouquet of Bourbon subtly blended with the aroma of his cigar and the fine edge of his reason had been dulled by so much when he matched his boy's wit against hers. His mind had not sought out the hidden motive that lay behind what she had said; he had followed where she led and, finding her logic impregnable, had yielded like a child, in a pique. Yes, yielded out of spite without ever once thinking that she worked, day by day, for McBain.

A dull rage came over him and when he roused up next morning that fixed idea was still in his brain. But in the morning it was different. Those two personalities that had been so exalted, and differentiated, by drink, snapped back into one substantial I Am; and his tumultuous, fighting ego took command. Rimrock rose up thinking and the first hour after breakfast found him working feverishly to build up a defense. He had been jumped once before by Andrew McBain —it must not happen again. No technicality must be left to serve as a handle for this lawyer-robber to seize. Before noon that day Rimrock had two gangs

of surveyors on their way to his Tecolote claims; and for a full week they labored, running side-lines, erecting monuments and taking angles on every landmark for miles. The final blue-prints, duly certified and witnessed, he took to the Recorder himself and then, still obsessed by his premonition of evil, he came back to serve notice on McBain.

For every man there is always some person instinctively associated with trouble; some person that he hates beyond all bounds and reason, and intuitively fears and distrusts. In the jumping of the Gunsight there had been others just as active, but Rimrock had forgiven them all but McBain. Even the piratical L. W., for all his treachery, was still within the pale of his friendship. But this tall, lanky Scotchman, always lurking within the law as a spider hides for safety in its hole, invoked nothing but his anger and contempt.

Rimrock dropped off the train that had brought him from the County seat, and went straight up the street to the hotel. McBain was in his office, stalking nervously up and down as he dictated to Mary Fortune, when the door opened suddenly and Rimrock Jones stepped in and stood gazing at him insolently.

"Good morning," he said with affected nicety of speech. "I hope that I don't intrude. Yes, it *is* lovely weather, but I came here on a matter of business. We've had our difficulties, Mr. Apex McBain, but all that is in the past. What I came to say is: I've got

my eye on you and I don't want you out at my mine. Those claims are my property and, I give you fair notice, if you trespass on my ground you'll get shot. That's all for the present; but, because you've cleaned me once, don't think you can do it again."

He bowed with mock politeness, taking off his hat with a flourish, and as he backed out Mary Fortune turned pale. There was something in that bow and the affected accents that referred indirectly to her. She knew it intuitively and the hot blood rushed back and mantled her cheeks with red. Then she straightened up proudly and when McBain began to dictate her machine went on clacking defiantly.

There followed long days in which Rimrock idled about town or rode back and forth to his mine, and then the gossips began to talk. A change, over night, had taken place in Rimrock the day after his return from New York. On the first great day he had been his old self—boasting, drinking, giving away his money and calling the whole town in on his joy. The next day he had been sober and from that day forth he had not taken even a drink. It was noted also that nothing was doing in the direction of developing his mine; and another quality, the rare gift of reticence, had taken the place of his brag. He sat off by himself, absent-minded and brooding, which was not like the Rimrock of old.

The first man to break loose from the spell he cast by the flash of his big roll of bills was L. W. Lock-

hart, the banker. For some reason best known to himself Rimrock still carried his roll in his pocket, whereas any good business man will tell you that he should have deposited it in the bank. And one thing more—not a man in Gunsight knew the first thing about his associates in the mine.

"I'll tell you the truth," said the overbearing L. W. as he stood arguing with Rimrock in front of the Alamo, "I don't believe you've got any company. I believe you went East with that two thousand dollars and won a stake at gentleman's poker; and then you come back, with your chest all throwed out, and get mysterious as hell over nothing."

"Well, what do *you* care?" answered Rimrock scornfully. "You don't stand to win or lose, either way!"

"Nope! Nope!" pronounced Hassayamp positively, "he's got a company—I know that. I reckon that's what worries him. Anyhow, they's something the matter; he ain't took a drink in a week. Seems like when he was broke he was round hyer all the time, jest a-carousin' and invitin' in the whole town; and now when he's flush and could buy me out with that little wad right there in his jeans, he sits here, by George, like a Keeley graduate, and won't even drink when he's asked."

"Well, laugh," grumbled Rimrock as Old Hassayamp began to whoop, "I reckon I know what I'm doing. When you've got nothing to lose except your

reputation it don't make much difference what you do; but when you're fixed like I am, with important affairs to handle, a man can't afford to get drunk. He might sign some paper, or make some agreement, and euchre himself out of millions."

"Aw! Millions! Millions!" mocked L. W., "your mine ain't worth a million cents. A bunch of low-grade copper on the Papago Desert, forty miles on a line from the railroad and everything packed in by burros. Who's going to buy it? That's what I ask and I'm waiting to hear the answer."

He paused and waited while Rimrock smiled and felt thoughtfully through his clothes for a match.

"Well, don't let it worry you," he said at last. "I'm not telling everything I know. If I did, by grab, there'd be a string of men from here to the Tecolote Hills."

"Yes—coming back!" jeered the provocative L. W.; but Rimrock only smiled again and gazed away through a thin veil of smoke.

"You just keep your shirt on, Mr. Know-it-all Lockhart, and remember that large bodies move slowly. You'll wake up some morning and read the answer written in letters ten feet high."

"Yes—For Rent!" grunted L. W., and shutting down on his cigar, he stumped off up the street; but Old Hassayamp Hicks nodded and winked at Rimrock, though at that he was no wiser than L. W.

Rimrock kept his own counsel, sitting soberly by

himself and mulling over what was on his mind; and at last he went to see Mary Fortune. It was of her he had been thinking, though in no sentimental way, during the long hours that he sat alone. Who was this woman, he asked himself, and what did she want with that stock? And should he give it to her? That was the one big question and it took him two weeks to decide.

He came into her office while she was running her typewriter and nodded briefly as he glanced out the rear door; then without any preliminaries he drew out an engraved certificate and laid it down on her desk.

"There's your stock," he said. "I've just endorsed it over to you. And now you can give me back that paper."

He did not sit down, did not even take off his hat; and he studiously avoided her eyes.

"Oh, thank you," she replied, glancing hurriedly at the certificate, "won't you sit down while I write out a receipt?"

She picked up the paper, a beautiful piece of engraving, and looked it over carefully.

"Oh, *two* thousand shares?" she murmured questioningly. "Yes, I see; there are two hundred thousand in all. 'Par value, one hundred dollars.' I suppose that's just nominal. How much are they really worth?"

"A hundred dollars a share," he answered grimly

and as she cried out he picked up a pen and fumbled idly with its point.

"Oh, surely they aren't worth so much as that?" she exclaimed, but he continued his attentions to the pen.

"No?" he enquired and then he waited with an almost bovine calm.

"Why, no," she ran on, "why, I'd——"

"You'd what?" he asked, but the trap he had set had been sprung without catching its prey.

"Why, it seems so much," she evaded rather lamely.

"Oh, I thought you were going to say you'd like to sell."

"No, I wouldn't sell," she answered quickly as her breath came back with a gasp.

"Because if you would," he went on cautiously, "I'm in the market to buy. It'll be a long time before that stock pays any dividend. How'd you like to sell a few shares?"

"No, I'd rather not—not now, at least. I'll have to think it over first. But won't you sit down? Really, I'm quite overcome! It's so much more than I had a right to expect."

"If you'd sell me a few shares," went on Rimrock without finesse, "you wouldn't have to work any more. Just name your price and——"

"Oh, I like to work," she countered gaily as she ran off a formal receipt; and, signing her name, she handed it back to him with a twinkle of amusement in her

eyes. "And then there's another reason—sit down, I want to talk to you—I think it will be better for you. Oh, I know how you feel about it; but did you ever consider that other people like their own way, too? Well, when you're off by yourself just think that over, it will help you understand life."

Rimrock Jones sat down with a thud and took off his hat as he gazed at this astonishing woman. She was giving him advice in a most superior manner; and yet she was only a typist.

"You said something one time," she went on seriously, "that hurt my feelings very much—something about being trimmed, and by a woman! I resolved right there that you needed to be educated. Do you mind if I tell you why? Well, in the first place, Mr. Jones, I admire you very much for the way you've kept your word. You are absolutely honest and I won't forget it when it comes to voting my stock. But that cynical attitude that you chose to affect when you came to see me before—that calm way of saying that you couldn't trust anybody, not even the person addressed—that won't get you very far, where a woman is concerned. That is, not very far with me."

She looked him over with a masterful smile and Rimrock began to fumble his hat.

"You took it for granted," she went on accusingly, "that I had set out from the first to trim you but—and here's the thing that makes me furious—you said: 'Trimmed, by grab, by a *woman!*' Now I'd like to

enquire if in your experience you have found women less honest than men; and in the second place I'd like to inform you that I'm just as intelligent as you are. It was no disgrace, as I look at the matter, for you to be bested by me; and as for being trimmed, I'd like to know what grounds you have for that remark? Did I ever ask more than you yourself had promised, or than would be awarded in a court of law? And couldn't I have said, when you went off without seeing me or writing a single word; couldn't I have said, when you went off with my money and were enjoying yourself in New York, that *I* had been trimmed—by a *man?*"

She spat out the word with such obvious resentment that Rimrock jumped and looked towards the door. It came over him suddenly that this mild, handsome woman was at heart strictly anti-man. That was putting it mildly, she was anti-Jones and might easily be tempted too far; for right there in her hand she held two thousand shares of stock that could be used most effectively as a club.

"Well, just let me explain," he stammered abjectly. "I want you to know how that came about. When I came back from the claims I'd spent all that money and I had to have two thousand more. I had to have it, to get back to New York, or our mine wouldn't have been worth anything. Well, I went to L. W., the banker up here, and bluffed him out of the money. But I know him too well—he'd think it over and if

he caught me in town he'd renig. Demand back his money, you understand; so I ran out and swung up on the freight. Never stopped for nothing, and that was the reason I never came around to call."

"And your right hand?" she asked sweetly, "the one that you write with? It was injured, I suppose, in the mine. I saw it wrapped up when you rode past the window, so everything is nicely explained."

She kept on smiling and Rimrock squirmed in his chair, until he gave way to a sickly grin.

"Well, I guess you've got me," he acknowledged sheepishly, "never was much of a hand to write."

"Oh, that's all right," she answered gamely, "don't think I mean to complain. I'm just telling you the facts so you'll know how I felt when you suggested that you had been trimmed. Now suppose, for example, that you were a woman who had lost all the money she had. And suppose, furthermore, that you had an affliction that an expensive operation might cure. And suppose you had worked for a year and a half to save up four hundred dollars, and then a man came along who needed that money ten times as badly as you did. Well, you know the rest. I loaned you the money. Don't you think I'm entitled to this?"

She picked up the certificate of stock and readjusted the 'phone receiver to her ear; and Rimrock Jones, after staring a minute, settled back and nodded his head.

"Yes, you are," he said. "And furthermore——" He reached impulsively for the roll of bills but she checked him by a look.

"No," she said, "I'm not asking for sympathy nor anything else of the kind. I just want you to know that I've earned this stock and that nobody here has been trimmed."

"That's right," he agreed and his eyes opened wider as he took her all in, once more. "Say, was that the reason you were saving your money?" he asked as he glanced at the ear-'phone. "Because if I'd a-known it," he burst out repentantly, "I'd never touched it—no, honest, I never would."

"Well, that's all right," she answered frankly, "we all take a chance of some kind. But now, Mr. Jones, since we understand each other, don't you think we can afford to be friends?"

She rose smiling and back into her eye came that look he had missed once before. It came only for a moment—the old, friendly twinkle that had haunted his memory for months—and as Rimrock caught it he leapt to his feet and thrust out his great, awkward hand.

"W'y, sure," he said, "and I'm proud to know you. Say, I'm coming around again."

CHAPTER VIII

A Flier in Stocks

IT was as dazzling to Rimrock as a burst of sunshine to a man just come up from a mine—that look in Mary Fortune's eyes. He went out of her office like a man in a dream and wandered off by himself to think. But that was the one thing he could not negotiate, his brain refused to work. It was a whirl of weird flashes and forms and colors, like a futurist painting gone mad, but above it all when the turmoil had subsided was the thought of going back. He had told her when he left her that he would come around again, and that fixed idea had held to the end. But how? Under what pretext? And would she break down his pretense with that smile?

Rimrock thought it over and it seemed best at the end to invite her to take a ride. There were certain things in connection with their mine which he wished very much to discuss, but how could he do it in the hotel lobby with the Gunsight women looking on? Since his rise to affluence one of them had dared to speak to him, but she would never do it again. He remembered too well the averted glances with which they had passed him, poor and ragged, on the street.

No, he hated them passionately as the living symbols of Gunsight fraud and greed; the soft, idle women of those despicable parasites who now battened on what he had earned.

But Mary Fortune, how else was he to meet her without envious eyes looking on; or stealthy ears of prying women, listening at keyholes to catch every word? And out on the desert, gliding smoothly along in the best hired automobile in town, where better could he give expression to those surging confidences which he was impelled against his judgment to make? It was that same inner spirit that made all his troubles, now urging him he knew not where. All he knew for certain was that the shy woman-look had crept back for a moment into her eyes; and after that the fate of empires was as nothing to the import of her smile. Did she feel, as he felt, the mystic bond between them, the appeal of his young man's strength; or was that smile a mask, a provocative weapon, to veil her own thoughts while she read through his like a book? He gave it up; but there was a way of knowing—he could call out that smile again.

The idle women of the Gunsight Hotel, sitting in their rockers on the upper porch, were rewarded on that day for many a wasted hour. For long months they had watched McBain's typist, with her proud way of ignoring them all; and at last they had something to talk about. Rimrock Jones in his best, and with a hired automobile, came gliding up to her office;

and as he went tramping in every ear on the veranda was strained to catch his words.

"Aw, don't mind those old hens," he said after a silence, roaring it out that all could hear. "They're going to talk anyway so let's take a ride; and make 'em guess, for once, what I say."

There was nothing, after that, for the ladies to do but retire in the best form they could; but as Mary Fortune came out in an auto' bonnet with a veil and coat to match they tore her character to shreds from behind the Venetian blinds. So that was her game—she had thrown over McBain and was setting her cap for Rimrock Jones. And automobile clothes! Well, if that wasn't proof that she was living down a past the ladies would like to know. A typewriter girl, earning less that seventy dollars a month, and with a trunk full of joy-riding clothes!

With such women about her it called for some courage for Mary Fortune to make the plunge; but the air was still fragrant, spring was on the wind and the ground dove crooned in his tree. She was tired, worn out with the deadly monotony of working on day by day; and she had besides that soul-stirring elation of having won in the great game for her stock.

"It'll be a stockholders' meeting," Rimrock had explained in her ear. "We represent a majority of the stock. I want to tell you something big, where nobody else will hear. Come on, let your typewriting slide!"

And Mary Fortune had laughed and run scampering up the stairs and come down with her gloves and veil, and as the automobile moved off she had that joyous sensation of something about to happen. They drove out of town on the one straight road that led to the Gunsight mine and Rimrock was so busy with the mechanics of his driving that she had a chance to view the landscape by herself. The white, silty desert, stretching off to blue mountains, was set as regularly as a vineyard with the waxy, dark-green creosote bushes; and at uncertain intervals the fluted giant cactus rose up like sentinels on the plain. All the desert trees that grew near the town—the ironwoods and palo verdes and cat-claws and mesquite and salt-bushes—had been uprooted by the Mexicans in their search for wood; but in every low swale the grass was still green and the cactus was crowned with gorgeous blossoms.

"Isn't it glorious?" she sighed as she breathed the warm air and Rimrock looked up from studying his clutches.

"The finest God ever made!" he said as his engine chugged smoothly along. "By George, I was glad to get home. Ever been in New York? Well, you know what it's like then; give me Arizona, every time. But say, that's some town; I stayed at the Waldorf, where the tips are a dollar a throw. Every time you turn around, or the boy grabs your hat, you give him a dollar bill. Say, I put up a front—they all thought

I was a millionaire—have you ever been down to the curb market? Oh, don't you know what that is? Why, it's the place near Wall street where they sell stock in the middle of the street."

He negotiated a sand wash and nearly stripped a gear as he threw in the low by mistake.

"You bet, quite a country!" he went on unconcernedly. "I thought I knew sign language, but those curb brokers have got me beat. I can sit down with an Indian and by signs and sand-pictures I can generally make him savvy what I want, but those fellers back there could buy and sell me while I was asking the price of a horse. I was down there on Broad street and a man in the crowd jumped up and let out a yell.

" 'Sold!' says a feller that's standing next to me, and began to make signs to a fellow in a second-story window and writes something down on a pad. I asked a man that was taking me around—they treated me right in that town—what in the world was going on, and he told me they'd made a trade in stock. The first fellow says:

" 'Sell five hundred shares of So-and-So at seventy-nine!' and the second man raises his right hand like an Indian how-sign and there's a twenty thousand-dollar trade pulled off. They both write it down on a slip of paper and the man in the window does the telephoning. Say, I'm going back there when I got a stake, and try my hand at that game."

An expression of pain, as of some evil memory, passed swiftly over Mary Fortune's face and she turned from gazing at the mountains to give him a warning shake of the head.

"Don't you do it!" she said; but when he asked her why not she shut her lips and looked far away.

"You must've got bit some time," he suggested cheerfully, but she refused for the moment to be drawn out.

"Perhaps," she replied, "but if that's the case my advice is all the more sound."

"No, but I'm on the inside," he went on impressively. "I know some of those big ones personally. That makes the difference; those fellows don't lose, they skim the cream off of everything. Say, I ought to know—didn't I go in there lone-handed and fight it out with a king of finance? That's the man we're in with—I can't tell you his name, now—he's the one that owns the forty-nine per cent. They're crazy about copper or he'd never have looked at me—there's some big market fight coming on. And didn't he curse and squirm and holler, trying to make me give up my control? He told me in years he had never gone into anything unless he got more than half *for a gift!* But I told him 'no,' I'd been euchered out of one mine; and after his expert had reported on the property he came through and gave me my way. And after that! Say, there was nothing too good for me. He agreed to spend several million dollars to pay for his share

of the mine and then he gave me that roll of bills to bind the bargain we'd made. By George, I felt good, to go there with two thousand dollars and come back with a big roll of yellowbacks; but before I went away he introduced me to a friend and told him how to show me the sights.

"This friend was a broker, by the name of Buckbee, and believe me, he's on the inside. He took me around and showed me the Stock Exchange and put me wise to everything. We were up in the gallery and, on the floor below us, there were a whole lot of posts with signs; and a bunch of the craziest men in the world were fighting around those posts. Fight? They were tearing each other's clothes off, throwing paper in the air, yelling like drunk Indians, knocking each other flat. It was so rough, by George, it scared me; but Buckbee told me they were selling stocks. There were thousands of dollars in every yell they let out, they talked signs like they were deaf and dumb, and every time a man held up his right hand it meant: Sold! And they wrote it down on a slip."

Rimrock paused in his description to make some hurried adjustments as his machine slowed down to a stop, but after a hasty glance he burst into a laugh and settled back in his seat.

"Well, what do we care?" he went on recklessly. "This desert is all the same. We can sit right here and see it all, and when it comes time to go back I'll shake the old engine up. But as I was telling you,

playing the stock market is all right if you've got some one to put you wise."

"No, it isn't," she answered positively. "I've been there and I know."

"Well, listen to this then," went on Rimrock eagerly, "let me show you what Buckbee can do. I dropped in at his office, after I'd received my roll, and he said: 'Want to take a flier?'

" 'Sure,' I said, 'here's a thousand dollars. Put it on and see how far it will go.' Well, you can believe me or not, in three days' time he gave me back over two thousand dollars."

He nodded triumphantly, but the woman beside him shook her head and turned wearily away.

"That's only the beginning," she answered sadly, "the end is—what happened to me."

"What was that?" he asked and she gazed at him curiously with a look he did not understand.

"Well, you can see for yourself," she said at last, "this is the first pleasure I've had for a year. I used to have a home with servants to wait on me, and music, and society and all, and when my father died and left me alone I might even then have kept on. But—well, I'll tell it to you; it may make you stop and think the next time you meet one of those brokers. My father was a judge and the ethics of his profession prevented him from speculating in stocks, but he had an old friend, his college classmate, who had made millions and millions on the Stock Exchange.

He was one of the most powerful financiers in New York and when my father died he made the request that Mr. Rossiter should invest my legacy for me. My father knew that the money he left would barely keep me, at the best; and so he asked this old friend of his to see that it was safely invested.

"So when the estate had been administered I went to see Mr. Rossiter and, after discussing different investments, he told me of a plan he had. It seems he was at the head of a tremendous combination that controlled the price of a certain stock and, although it was strictly against the rules, he was going to give me a tip that would double my money in a few weeks. I was afraid, at first, but when he guaranteed me against loss I took all my money to a certain broker and bought forty-three thousand shares. Then I watched the papers and every day I could see the price of it going up. One day it nearly doubled and then it went back, and then stopped and went up and up. In less than a month the price went up from twenty-three cents to nearly fifty and then, just at a time when it was rising fastest, Mr. Rossiter called me to his office again. He took me back into his private room and told me how much he had loved my father. And then he told me that the time had come for me to take my profits and quit; that the market was safe for a man of his kind who was used to every turn of the game, but the best thing for me now was to get my money from my broker and invest

it in certain five per cent. bonds. And then he made me promise, as long as I lived, never to buy a share of stock again."

She paused and sighed.

"Can you guess what I did?" she asked. "What would you do in a case like that? Well, I went to the broker and sold back my shares and then I stood watching the tape. I had learned to read it and somehow it fascinated me—and my stock was still going up. In less than two hours it had gone up twenty points—it was the only stock that was sold! And when I saw what I could have gained by waiting—what do you think I did?"

"You turned right around," answered Rimrock confidently, "and bought the same stock again."

"No, you're wrong," she said with a twist of the lips, "I'm a bigger gambler than that. I put up all my money on a ten-point margin and was called and sold out in an hour. The stock went tumbling right after I bought it and, before I could order them to sell, the price had gone down far below my margin and the brokers were in a panic. They wouldn't stop to explain anything to me—all they said was that I had lost. I went back home and thought it over and decided never to let him know—Mr. Rossiter, I mean; he had been so kind to me, and I hadn't done what he said. I found out afterwards that, shortly after I had left him, he had deliberately wrecked the price; and he, poor man, was thinking all the

time, what a favor he had done his old friend's daughter."

She laughed, short and mirthlessly, and Rimrock sat looking at her, his eyes once more big with surprise. She was not the inexperienced creature he had taken her for, she was a woman with high spots in her career.

"Well, then what did you do?" he enquired at last as she showed no disposition to proceed. "How'd you come to get out here? Did you know old McBain or——"

"Say, can't you start that engine?" she spoke up sharply. "Let's go on and forget about the rest. I'm here, we know that; and I only told you what I did to break you of gambling in stocks."

"No, that engine is stalled," he said with authority, "but I'll get it to go, when it's time. But say, tell me something—we're going to be friends, you know—does Rossiter know where you are now?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, "I write to him frequently. He thinks I'm out here for my health. I have this trouble, you know, and the doctors advised me to come out where the air is dry."

"Well, you're a peach," observed Rimrock admiringly. "And the old man still thinks you're rich? What'll he say, do you think, when he hears of your latest—getting in on this Tecolote strike?"

"Oh, I won't dare tell him," she answered quickly. "I'm afraid he wouldn't approve. And may I make

a suggestion? If you'll throw on your spark I think your engine will run."

"Say, you scare me!" said Rimrock with a guilty grin. "You're so smart you make me afraid. I'll crank her up, too—do you think that would help some? Huh, huh; I get caught every time!"

CHAPTER IX

You Don't Understand

"WELL, well," remarked Rimrock after he had started his machine and the desert was gliding smoothly by, "so that's why they call you Miss Fortune, eh? Losing all your money on that stock."

The silent woman who sat beside him closed her lips, but made no reply. He glanced at her curiously. She was deaf, of course, though she seldom showed it—perhaps she had failed to hear.

"But that can be fixed," he said, speaking louder, "you can cut off that Miss, any time."

"Yes," she said with a touch of sarcasm, "I believe I've heard that before."

"But I mean it!" he declared and she smiled rather grimly. "And that!" she answered, whereupon Rimrock flushed. He had used those words before in exactly the same connection. It must be madness, this insane prompting that moved him to talk love to this girl. The first time he had met her, after a scant hour of conversation, he had made that equivocal remark: "How about fifty-fifty—an undivided half?" And many times since, when he came to think of it, he had wondered how the words had slipped out. It

was a way he had, of speaking impulsively, but now it was more than that. He had deliberately planned to take her out on the desert and ask her that question again. There was something about her that destroyed his judgment even when, as now, she made no effort to charm.

"Then that shows I mean it!" he answered fatuously. "I meant it, the very first time."

"Well, it's very flattering," she said, dimpling slightly, "but isn't this rather sudden?"

"You bet it's sudden—that's the way I do things!" He dropped the wheel and caught her in his arms.

"Oh, be careful," she cried and as he tried roughly to kiss her she thrust him in the throat with her elbow. They struggled for a moment and then, as the machine made a swerve, she laid her hands on the wheel.

"Just let me drive this machine," she said, "and remember—you are supposed to be a gentleman."

"Well, I am!" protested Rimrock as he came out of his madness. "What's the matter? Are you going back home?"

She had flung a quick turn out across a hard flat and was swinging back into the road.

"I think we'd better," she answered quietly. "I hope you haven't made any mistake?"

"Why—no!" he stammered. "Why? What do you mean? Don't you think I'm on the square? Well, I certainly am; I'm asking you to marry me!"

"Yes, but even then; have I given you any reason

to think I'm so madly infatuated? Of course I was foolish to come out with you this way, but I assure you I'm no flighty girl."

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" protested Rimrock abjectly. "Say, now listen, you don't understand." He stopped and panted as he fought down his emotions and the automobile sped smoothly on. It was eight or ten miles across the level desert and a few minutes would bring them into town. "You don't know my ways," he went on bluffly, "but say, you don't need to be afraid. Just slow down a little, I want to talk with you—you're the finest girl I know. I want you, don't you see? And when I want anything——"

He stopped as she glanced at him swiftly.

"Yes, you try to take it," she said and curled her lip with scorn. "I understand you, perfectly; but I want to tell *you* something—there are some things you can't get that way. And one of them is love. That has to be given to you—and you have to be worthy of it—I don't suppose you ever thought about that."

She kept her eyes on the road ahead, but Rimrock could see that she was biting her lip with anger.

"That's the thing I don't like about you," she burst out passionately, "you never think about anybody else. You always resort to violence. And just because you can walk in on Mr. McBain——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Rimrock, leaning forward accusingly; but she scorned to meet his stare.

"—just because you can terrorize him with that pistol you carry——"

"So that's what's the matter," went on Rimrock significantly, "you're thinking about Andy McBain!"

"Mr. Jones!" she burst out, bringing the auto to a stop, "I guess this has gone far enough. Will you walk to town, or shall I?"

"Neither one," he said quietly, taking over the wheel, "I'll drive you to the hotel myself."

"Very well," she said and sat back white with anger as mile after mile sped past.

"Here you are," he said as he slowed down at the Gunsight and suddenly she was her old, sweet self.

"Thank you very much," she said, stepping gracefully out of the car; "the country was very beautiful." And she went smilingly in through the door.

Rimrock Jones sat silent, struck dumb by her manner, so different from her cold, silent wrath; and then he caught a flash of movement on the veranda. She was hiding their quarrel from the women!

"Sorry you couldn't stay longer," he answered, taking off his hat with a belated flourish. "Good evening," he added and then, jamming on his hat, he drove off where he could be alone.

After twenty-four hours of conflicting emotions Rimrock weakened and took his troubles to Hassayamp; and after a passionate presentation of his side of the misunderstanding he acknowledged that the lady was right. He was nothing but a brute, a despic-

able barbarian, not worthy to look at her; a presumptuous hound, and so on. But he told Hassayamp, as one friend to another, that there would soon be a dead dog in camp; and if Andy McBain ever crossed his path he would shoot him down in his tracks.

With all this on his mind he made very poor company and Gunsight had just about decided he had failed on his mine when it awoke to a sudden miracle. A large party of surveyors had come in during the night and were running a line to the south. Straight out across the desert, while the morning light was good, they had driven their line of stakes; a line which sighted as true as a rifle to the Tecolote Hills. It was for a wagon road, perhaps—but why these surveyors when the whole desert was as flat as a board? A railroad! The whole town jumped to the same conclusion at once and the rush for the Tecolotes was on.

The men who had laughed at Rimrock Jones for months were leaders in the wild stampede and Hassayamp roused up Rimrock from where he was brooding and warned him to get to his ground.

"They'll jump you," he bellowed, "the whole town is going. They'll stake every claim for miles!"

"Let 'em stake!" answered Rimrock whose mood was vindictive, "and the first man that jumps me, I'll jump him, by grab, with this!"

He patted his pistol which, in its ancient holster was once more slung on his hip, and stalked sullenly out into the street. Every wagon and buckboard in

the town of Gunsight seemed lined up in front of the stores. Men rushed to and fro with canteens and grub-sacks or half-filled boxes and sacks.

"Is it a railroad?" they yelled as Rimrock appeared and he answered:

"You bet your life it is!"

That settled it, and soon across the desert there went a procession of horsemen and wagons. Those who could travel no other way filled syrup cans with water and started for the Tecolotes on foot. A railroad! Well, why had they never thought of that in the long, wasted days before? Even L. W., the scoffer, caught the sudden contagion; but Andrew McBain did not stir. He was a cautious man and good friends had told him that Rimrock Jones had threatened his life. He stayed in town—and Rimrock stayed also—and soon the procession came back. It was led by L. W. in his cactus-proof automobile, and he reported all the ground as staked. He reported further that the ground was worthless, but Rimrock Jones only smiled.

"Yes, all that's left," he answered grimly. "I made you out a sucker, for once. I guess you remember when I offered you a share in my mine for two thousand dollars or less; but now, by grab, I've staked it all and you Gunsight boys can go bust. And I give you fair warning!" he shouted fiercely, "I'll say it to all of you—the first man that jumps me, I'll kill him!"

"Well, who's trying to jump you?" asked L. W.

irritably. "What's biting you, anyway? Ain't your claims all legal? Has anybody disputed you? Well, get onto yourself, you danged fool!"

"Well, all the same," went on Rimrock insistently, "I know what some people will do. I don't name no names, but I've been cleaned out once——"

"Aw, you make me tired!" snapped back L. W., "you're crazy — and what's more you're drunk! You're a hell of a subject to be Gunsight's first citizen, a building ho-tels, and general stores and banks!"

"Well, all the same, you watch me do it! I'm going to make this town over right. And I warn you all, you can't be friends with me and that dastardly McBain outfit, too. It's a fight to a finish and I don't care who knows it, I'm going to bust him if it takes my last cent. I'm not talking about L. W. nor anybody else—you can jump any way you please—but there's one man in this town that I'm out to get and I'll kill him, by grab, if he peeps!"

"You talk too much!" answered L. W. scornfully. "Why don't you go and put up that gun? If we had a town marshal that was worth the powder he'd come around and take it away."

"He would not," retorted Rimrock, "because he knows I won't give it up. I'm carrying that gun just to let people know that I'm out now to fight for my rights. As long as I'm left alone in my legal rights I'm the most peaceable man in this town, but the first

man that builds a monument on my claims is going to find that I can't be bluffed."

"Oh, cut it off," cried L. W. in disgust, "we know you're bad—you've told us before. And as for Andrew McBain, you'd better not crowd him too far; he'll fight, on a pinch, himself."

"All right, if he wants it. I've got my eye on him. I'm just waiting till he makes the first move. I know it's coming, but as sure as he does it——"

"Plain drunk," grunted L. W. contemptuously and stumped away up the street.

It was easy enough to say Rimrock was drunk, but it was soon demonstrated that he was not crazy. He was standing in front of the Alamo Saloon, still holding forth against McBain, when a Mexican boy beckoned him off to one side and slipped a note into his hand.

"Please come to my office at once.—M. F."

Rimrock read it over and thrust it into his pocket, then drew it out and read it over again; after which he went up the street.

He stepped into the office with his eyes fixed and sullen and she met him just inside the door.

"I'll accept your apology for your conduct the other day," she said with compelling calm, "and then I want to tell you some news."

"All right," mumbled Rimrock, "I apologize, all

right. I was a miserable, pot-licking hound. I'd give my right hand——"

"Yes, yes, that's all right," she broke in hurriedly, "but here's what I want to say. Mr. McBain has been up to Geronimo and got him a copy of that survey of your claims!"

"I knowed it!" burst out Rimrock swinging his fist into his hand, "I saw him get off that train!"

"No, listen!" she said, "you mustn't talk so loud! You mustn't talk at all! Just listen to what I say. I depend on you to save our mine."

"I'll do it!" began Rimrock; but she made a motion for silence and went swiftly on with her tale.

"More than that," she said. "I happen to know that he's looked up the names of those Mexicans, the original locators of your claims; and I think—I can't be sure—but I think that one or two of them were not citizens of the United States. Now wait! I've not finished! I'm looking to you to go out there and protect our claims!"

"Well—the dirty—thief!" rumbled Rimrock in his throat. "I didn't think he had the nerve. But say," he went on, suddenly struck with an idea, "how come you're telling me all this? I thought you and McBain——"

"We won't discuss that, if you please," she broke in, blushing painfully. "There are some things you don't understand. But I think, under the circumstances, I have the right to take steps to protect my

own interests. Now will you go out to the claims and keep them from being jumped, or——"

"Leave it to me," he said, the fighting light in his eyes. "Where's McBain? He's the man I've got to stop."

"No, now let's not have any violence. I know something of the law. All you need to do is to stay on the ground. If you're in possession——"

"That's got nothing to do with it!" he burst out impatiently. "This has gone beyond the law. I've warned this man McBain before all kinds of witnesses not to set his foot on my ground; and if he does it—I'll make him pay for it."

He started for the door, hitching up his belt, and she caught at his pistol as he passed.

"No," she said, "I don't want you to shoot him. I'd rather we'd lose the mine."

"You don't understand," he answered. "This has got nothing to do with a mine." He took both her hands in one of his and put them firmly away. "It's between me and him," he said and went off without looking back.

CHAPTER X

The Fight for the Old Juan

WHEN a man's honor is questioned—his honor as a fighting man—it is the dictum of centuries of chivalry that he shall not seek to avoid the combat. A great fortune was at stake, many millions of dollars and the possession of a valuable mine, and yet Rimrock Jones did not move. He walked around the town and held conferences with his friends until word came at last that he was jumped.

"All right," he said and with Hassayamp and L. W. he started across the desert to his mine. Red-handed as he was from a former treachery, L. W. did not fail Rimrock in this crisis and his cactus-proof automobile took them swiftly over the trail that led to the high-cliffed Tecolotes. He went under protest as the friend of both parties, but all the same he went. And Hassayamp Hicks, who came from Texas where men held their honor above their lives; he went along as a friend in arms, to stand off the gunmen of McBain.

The news had come in that Andrew McBain had left Geronimo under cover of the night, with an automobile load of guards, and the next day at dawn some belated stampeders had seen them climbing up to the

dome. There lay the apex of the Tecolote claims, fifteen hundred lateral feet that covered the main body of the lode; and with the instinct of a mine pirate McBain had sought the high ground. If he could hold the Old Juan claim he could cloud the title to all the rich ground on both sides; and at the end of litigation, if he won his suit, all the improvements that might be built below would be of value only to him. Always providing he won; for his game was desperate and he knew that Rimrock would fight.

He had flung down the challenge and, knowing well how it would end, he had had his gunmen barricade the trail. They were picked-up men of that peculiar class found in every Western town, the men who live by their nerve. There were some who had been officers and others outlaws; and others, if the truth were known, both. And as neither officers nor outlaws are prone to question too closely the ethics of their particular trade so they asked no questions of the close-mouthed McBain, except what he paid by the day. Now, like any hired fighters, they looked well to their own safety and let McBain do the worrying for the crowd. He was a lawyer, they knew that, and it stood to reason he was acting within the law.

L. W.'s auto' reached Ironwood Springs, where Rimrock had made his old camp, while the sun was still two hours high. From the Springs to the dome, that great "bust-up" of porphyry which stood square-topped and sheer against the sky, there was a single

trail full of loose, shaly rocks that mounted up through a notch in the rim. They started up in silence, Rimrock leading the way and Hassayamp puffing along behind; but as they neared the heights, where the shattered base of the butte rose up from the mass of fallen debris, Rimrock forged on and left them behind.

"Hey, wait!" called Hassayamp with the last of his breath, but neither Rimrock nor L. W. looked back. It was a race to the top, Rimrock to get his revenge and L. W. to stop his mad rush; but in this race, as always, youth took the lead and L. W. lagged far behind. Like a mountain sheep on some familiar trail Rimrock bounded on until his breath came in whistling gasps; but, while the blood pounded against his brain-pan and his muscles quivered and twitched, the strength of ten men pulsed through his iron limbs, and he kept his face to the heights.

He was all of a tremble when, in the notch of the trail, he was challenged by a ringing:

"Halt!"

He stopped, sucked in a great breath and dashed the stinging sweat from his eyes; and then, hardly seeing the barricade before him or the rifles that thrust out between the rocks, he put down his head and toiled on. Right on the rim, where the narrow trail nicked it, the gunmen had built a low wall and as he came on unheeding they rose up from behind it and threw down on him with their rifles.

"Stop right where you are!" a guard called out harshly and Rimrock halted—and then he came on.

"Get back or we'll shoot!" shouted a grizzled gunman who now suddenly seemed to take charge. "This claim is held by Andrew McBain and the first man that trespasses get's killed!"

"Well, shoot then," panted Rimrock, still struggling up the pathway. "Go ahead—it's nothing to me."

"Hey, you stop!" commanded the gunman as Rimrock gained the barricade, and he struck him back with the muzzle of his gun. Rimrock staggered and caught himself and then held on weakly as his breath came in quivering sobs.

"That's all right," he gasped. "I've got no quarrel with you. I came to get Andrew McBain."

"Well, stay where you are," ordered the gunman sternly, "or I'll kill you, sure as hell."

Rimrock swayed back and forth as he clung to a bush that he had clutched in his first lurching fall and as he labored for breath he gazed about wildly at the unfamiliar faces of the men.

"Who are you boys?" he asked at last and as nobody answered him he glanced swiftly back down the trail.

"It's no use to try that," said the gunman shortly, "you can't rush us, behind the wall."

"Oh, I've got no men," answered Rimrock quickly, "those fellows are just coming along. I'm Henry Jones and I came to warn you gentlemen you're trespassing on one of my claims."

"Can't help it," said the guard, "we're here under orders to kill you if you come over this line."

He indicated the wall which barred the way to the location notice of the claim and Rimrock hitched his belt to the left.

"Show me your papers," he said. "You've got no right to kill any man until you prove that this claim is yours."

That hitch of the belt had brought his heavy six-shooter well around on the side of his leg and as the gunmen watched him he looked them over, still struggling to get back his breath. Then as no one moved he advanced deliberately and put his hand on the wall.

"Now," he said, "you show me your authority or I'll come over there and put you off."

There was a stir in the ranks of the grim-faced gun-fighters and their captain looked behind. Not forty feet away on the flat floor of the mesa was the shaft of the Old Juan claim and, tacked to the post that rose up from its rockpile was a new, unweathered notice.

"That's the notice," said the captain, "but you stay where you are. You knock down that wall and you'll get killed!"

"Killed nothing!" burst out Rimrock contemptuously, "you're afraid to shoot me!" And looking him straight in the eyes, he pushed the top rock off the wall.

"Now!" he said after a moment's silence as the gunmen moved uneasily about, "I'll do that again, and I'll keep on doing it until you show me that this ain't my claim."

"Mr. McBain!" called the captain and as Rimrock clutched at his pistol he found a gun thrust against his stomach.

"You make a crooked move," warned the captain sharply, "and——"

He stopped for up from the mouth of the Old Juan shaft came the head of Andrew McBain.

"Ah, hiding in a hole," spoke up Rimrock sneeringly, as McBain opened his mouth to talk. "I'd like to work for a man like you. Say, boys, take on with me—I'll double your money; and what's more I'll stand up for my rights!" He looked around at the line of gun-fighters, but their set lips did not answer his smile. Only in their eyes, those subtle mirrors of the mind, did he read the passing reflex of their scorn. "You're scared, you coward," went on Rimrock scathingly as McBain looked warily about. "Come out, if you're a man, and prove your title, or by grab, I'll come in there and get you!"

He stopped with a grunt for the hard-eyed captain had jabbed him with the muzzle of his gun.

"None of that," he said, but Rimrock took no notice —his eyes were fixed on McBain.

He came out of the hole with a waspish swiftness, though there was a wild, frightened look in his eyes;

and as he advanced towards the barricade he drew out a bulldog pistol and held it awkwardly in his hand.

"Mr. Jones," he began in his harsh lawyer's voice, "don't think for a moment you can bluff me. These men have their orders and at the first show of violence I have told them to shoot you dead. Now regarding this claim, formerly known as the Old Juan, you have no legal right to the same. In the first place, Juan Soto, whom you hired to locate it, is not an American citizen and therefore his claim is void. In the second place the transfer for the nominal sum of ten dollars proves collusion to perpetrate a fraud. And in the third place——"

"You're a liar!" broke in Rimrock, his breast heaving with anger, "he's as much a citizen as you are. He's been registered in Gunsight for twenty years and his vote has never been challenged."

"Juan Bautista Soto," returned McBain defiantly, "was born in Caborca, Sonora, on the twenty-fourth day of June, eighteen sixty. I have a copy of the records of the parish church to prove he is Mexican-born. And in the third place——"

"And in the third place," burst out Rimrock, raising his voice to a yell, "that proves conclusively that you've set out to steal my mine. I don't give a damn for your thirdlys and fourthlys, nor all the laws in the Territory. To hell with a law that lets a coyote like you rob honest men of their mines. This claim

is mine and I warn you now—if you don't get off of it, I'll kill you!"

He dropped his hand to his pistol and the startled gunmen looked quickly to their captain for a cue. But the captain stood doubtful—there were two sides to the question, and a man will only go so far to earn ten dollars a day.

"Now hear me," warned Rimrock as there fell a tense silence, "you get off——"

"Shoot that man!" yelled McBain as he sensed what was coming, but Rimrock was over the wall. He knocked it flat with the fury of his charge, striking the gunmen aside as he passed. There was a moment of confusion and then, as McBain turned to run, the bang of Rimrock's gun. Andrew McBain went down, falling forward on his face, and as Rimrock whirled on the startled gunmen they shot blindly and broke for cover. The fight had got beyond them, their hearts were not in it—and they knew that McBain was dead.

"You get off my claim!" cried Rimrock as he faced them and instinctively they backed away. That look in his eyes they knew all too well, it was the man-killing berserker rage. Many a time, on foreign battlefields or in the bloody saloon fights of the frontier, they had seen it gleaming in the eyes of some man whom nothing but death would stop. They backed off, fearfully, with their guns at a ready; and when they were clear they ran.

When L. W. looked over the shattered wall he saw Rimrock tearing down the notice and crunching it into the ground. He was perfectly calm, but in his staring blue eyes the death look still burned like live coals; and it was only when Hassayamp, risking his life from heart failure, toiled up and took charge of his claim that he could be persuaded to give himself up.

CHAPTER XI

A Little Trouble

RIMROCK came back to Gunsight in charge of a deputy sheriff and with the angry glow still in his eyes. The inquest was over and he was held for murder, but he refused to retain a lawyer.

"I don't want one," he said when his friends urged it on him. "I wish every lawyer was dead."

He sat in gloomy silence as the Gunsight justice of the peace went through the formalities of a preliminary examination and then, while they waited for the next train to Geronimo, he and the deputy dropped in on Mary Fortune.

"Good morning," he said, flushing up as she looked at him, "can you spare me a few minutes of your time?"

"Why, certainly," she answered, and he spoke to the deputy, who waited outside the door.

"I've had a little trouble," went on Rimrock grimly as he sat down where he could speak into her transmitter, "and I want you to help me out. Mr. Hicks over here is guarding the mine and I've sent four more boys out to help, but there's a whole lot of

business coming up. Can you hold down the job of Secretary?"

Mary Fortune thought a moment, then nodded her head and waited to hear what he would say.

"All right," he said, "I'll telegraph East and have the appointment O.K.'d. Then there's another matter. We're going to lay that railroad across the desert as they never laid one before—six months will see it done —but even that don't suit us. We're going to lay out our millsite and have everything ready the day that railroad is done. Then we're going to erect the mill and install the machinery and go to throwing dirt. Eight months at the least and we'll have a producing property shipping trainloads of ore every day. Well, what I was going to say—there's a man named Jepson, a mining engineer, coming out to superintend that work and I want you to give him all the assistance you can and help boost the thing along. That's all—I'll send you a check and the papers—you can address me at the County Jail."

He rose hastily and started for the door, then looked back with questioning eyes.

"Very well," she said and he dropped his head and slouched heavily out the door.

Mary Fortune sat alone, staring absently after him. What a contradictory man he was. And yet, how well he understood. He knew without telling that she would not take his hand so he kept it behind his back; but he knew at the same time that she would attend

to his business while his address was the County Jail. And no plea for sympathy, no word of explanation; just business, and then he was gone. His life was at stake, and yet he spoke of nothing but the mine. "A little trouble!" And he had killed a man. Was he a savage or a superman?

The mail the next day brought a note from him, written with a lead pencil on a piece of torn paper. It had the jail smell about it, a rank, caged-animal odor that she learned to recognize later, but there was no mention of any jail. He enclosed a check and a power of attorney, with directions for buying some land—and then there came a telegram from New York.

M. R. Fortune,
Gunsight, Arizona.

Wire from Henry Jones intimating trouble Tecolote claims. Your appointment agreeable. Spare no expense safeguard claims. Jepson superintendent arrives Friday. Wire particulars.

W. H. Stoddard.

One look at that signature and the Wall Street address and Mary Fortune saw with sudden clearness what had been mystery and moonshine for months. W. H. Stoddard was Whitney H. Stoddard, the man who controlled the Transcontinental Railroad. His name alone in connection with the Tecolote would send

its stock up a thousand per cent. And what a stroke of business that was—to make a feeder for his railroad while he built up a great property for himself. Now at last she understood the inexplicable reticence with which Rimrock had veiled his associate's name and her heart almost stopped as she thought how close she had come to parting with her Tecolote stock. Those two thousand shares, if she held on to them to the end, might bring her in thousands of dollars!

Her brain cleared like a flash and she remembered Rimrock's instructions concerning land for the Company's office. The wire could wait—and Whitney H. Stoddard—the first thing to do was to get an option, for even telegraph operators have been known to talk. She slipped out quietly and a half hour afterward the papers were drawn up and signed, and the whole vacant block across the street from the hotel was tied up for the Tecolote Mining Company. And then the great news broke.

It is a penal offense, punishable by heavy fine and imprisonment, for a telegraph operator to disclose the secrets of his files; but within ten minutes the whole street knew. The values on property went up in meteor flights as reckless speculators sought to buy in on the ground floor. All the land along the railroad, instead of being raw desert, became suddenly warehouse sites; the vacant lots along the main street were snatched up for potential stores and saloons, and all the drab flats where the Mexican burros wandered

became transformed to choice residence properties. It had come at last, that time prophesied by Rimrock when Gunsight would be transformed by his hand, but the prophet was not there to see. After all his labors, and his patient endurance of ridicule and unbelief, when the miracle happened Rimrock Jones the magician was immured in the County Jail.

But it made a difference. Even Mary Fortune came to think of him with more kindness in her heart. The Geronimo papers suddenly blossomed out with accounts of the Gunsight boom; and Rimrock Jones, though held for murder, was heralded as a mining king. The story was recalled of his discovery of the Gunsight and of his subsequent loss of the same; and the fight for the Old Juan, with the death of McBain, was rewritten to fit the times. Then the grading crew came with their mules and scrapers, and carloads of ties and rails. Great construction trains congested all the sidings as they dumped off tools and supplies. A track-laying machine followed close behind them, and the race for the Tecolotes was on. What a pity it was that poor Rimrock Jones was not there to see the dirt fly!

And there were other changes. From a plain office drudge, Mary Fortune, the typist, suddenly found herself the second in command. Every day from Geronimo there came letters and telegrams from the prisoner in the County Jail and his trenchant orders were put into effect by the girl who had worked for

McBain. Nothing more was said about her mysterious past, nor the stigma such a past implies; the women of the hotel now bowed to her hopefully and smiled if she raised her eyes. Even Jepson, the superintendent, addressed her respectfully—after stopping off at the County Jail—and all the accounts of the Company, for whatever expense, now passed through her competent hands.

She was competent, Jepson admitted it; yet somehow he did not like her. It was his wife, perhaps, a proud, black-eyed little creature, who first planted the prejudice in his breast; although of course no man likes to take orders from a woman. To be sure, she gave no orders, but she kept the books and that gave her a check on his work. But Abercrombie Jepson was too busily occupied to brood much over this incipient dislike, he had men by the hundred pouring out to the mine and all the details of a great plant on his hands.

First out across the desert went the derricks of the well-borers, to develop water for the concentrator and mill; and then diamond-drill men with all their paraphernalia, to block out the richest ore; and after them the millwrights and masons and carpenters, to lay foundations and build the lighter parts of the plant; and, back and forth in a steady stream, the long lines of teamsters, hauling freight from the end of the railroad. It was an awe-inspiring spectacle, this invasion of the desert, this sure preparation to open the

treasure-house where the Tecolotes had locked up their ore. But Rimrock was missing from it all!

There came a time when Mary Fortune acknowledged this to herself; and, without knowing just why, she took the next train to Geronimo. The summer had come on and the jail as she entered it was stifling with its close, smelly heat. She sickened at the thought of him, caged up there day and night, shut off even from light and air; and when the sheriff let her in through the clanging outer gate she started back at sight of the tanks. Within high walls of concrete a great, wrought-iron cell-house rose up like a square box of steel and, pressed against the bars, were obscene leering eyes staring out for a look at the woman.

"Oh, that's all right," said the sheriff kindly, "just step right down this way. I regret very much I can't bring him outside, but he's in for a capital offense."

He led the way down a resounding corridor, with narrow windows high up near the roof; and there, staring out from a narrow cell, she saw Rimrock Jones. His face was pale with the prison pallor and a tawny growth covered his chin; but the eyes—they were still the eyes of Rimrock, aggressive, searching and bold.

"A lady to see you," announced the sheriff and suddenly they were alone.

There had been some business, some important matter upon which she had needed his advice, but as she

saw him shut up like a common felon the sudden tears came to her eyes.

"Kind of limited quarters," observed Rimrock, smiling wanly, "nothing like that new hotel that we're building. Well, it won't be long now till I'm out of this hole. Is there anything special you want?"

"Why, yes!" she said, getting control of herself, "can't—can't we get you out on bail? I didn't know it was so awful inside here—I'm going to engage the best lawyer in town!"

"No use," answered Rimrock, "I'm held for murder —and I don't want no lawyer, anyhow."

The old stubborn tone had come back into his voice, but swift compassion urged her on.

"But you certainly will have one when your case goes to trial! Mr. Lockhart said he would hire one himself."

"Nope, don't want 'em," answered Rimrock. "They're a bunch of crooks. I'll handle my case myself."

"Yourself? Why, you don't know the law——"

"That's why I'll win," broke in Rimrock impatiently. "I'm going to pick out that jury myself."

"No, but the briefs and papers! And who will represent you in court?"

"Never mind," sulked Rimrock, "I'll take care of all that. But I won't have a lawyer, if I swing for it!"

"Oh!" she gasped, but he gazed at her grimly without thinking about anything but his case.

"All I want is justice," he went on doggedly. "I want a fair trial before a jury of Arizona men. When I state my case I'll tell them the truth and I don't want any lawyer butting in. And one thing more. I'm going to ask you, Miss Fortune, to leave this case strictly alone. I thank you just as much for your good intentions, but we don't look at this matter the same. I quit the law when I lost title to the Gunsight, and I'm going to play out my hand to the end. I claim there's a law that's above all these lawyers—and judges and supreme courts, too—and that's the will of the people. I may be mistaken, but I'll gamble my life on it and if I lose—you can have the whole mine."

"I don't want the whole mine," she answered resentfully, "I want—I want you to be free. Oh, I came to tell you about all we're doing—about the construction and the mine work and all—but I just can't say a word. Are you determined to plead your own case?"

"Why, certainly," he said. "Why shouldn't I do it? I don't consider I've done anything wrong. I hope you don't think, just because I killed McBain, that I'm suffering any regrets? Because I'm not, nor nothing of the kind—I'm glad I killed him like I did. He had it coming to him and, gimme a square jury, I'll make 'em say I did right."

"I guess I don't understand," she stammered at last, "but—but I'm glad that it doesn't seem wrong.

I can't understand how a man could do it; but I'll help you, any way I can."

"All right," said Rimrock and looked at her strangely, "I'll tell you what you can do. In the first place I want you to go back to Gunsight and stay there until I come back. And in the second place—well, I can't forget what I did—that day. I want you to say it's all right."

"It *is* all right," she answered quickly, "I guess that's what I came to say. And will you forgive me, too, for letting you lie here and never doing anything to help?"

"Oh, that's nothing," said Rimrock, "I don't mind it much. But say, isn't there anything else?"

"No!" she said, but the hot blood mounted up and mantled her cheeks with red.

"Come on," he beckoned. "Just to show you forgive me—it will help me to win if you do."

She looked around, up and down the narrow corridor, and then laid her cheek to the bars. Who would not do as much, out of Christian kindness, for a man who had suffered so much?

CHAPTER XII

Rimrock's Big Day

THE white heat of midsummer settled down on the desert and the rattlesnakes and Gila monsters holed up. As in the frozen East they hibernated in winter to escape the grip of the cold, so in sun-cursed Papaguería, where the Tecolotes lie, they crawled as deep to get away from the heat. But in the Geronimo jail with its dead, fetid air, Rimrock Jones learned to envy the snakes. Out on the stark desert, where the men laid the track, the hot steel burned everything it touched; but the air was clean and in the nights, when he suffocated, they lay cool and looked up at the stars. They did a man's work and drew their pay; he lay in the heat and waited.

Then the first cool days came and the Tecolote Mining Company resumed its work in feverish haste. An overplus of freight was jammed in the yards; the construction gangs laid track day and night; and from the end of the line, which crept forward each day, the freight wagons hauled supplies to the mine. There was a world of work, back and forth on the road; and in Tecolote and Gunsight as well. A magnificent hotel, with the offices of the Company, was springing up across the street from the Gunsight; at

the mine there were warehouses and a company store and quarters for the men on the flats where Rimrock had once pitched his tent. But the man who built them was Abercrombie Jepson—the master hand was slack.

It had killed a man and for that offense Rimrock Jones must wait on the law. There was no bail for him, for he had made a threat and then killed his man as he fled. And he would not deny it, nor listen to any lawyer; so he lay there till the circuit court convened. All through the slow inferno of that endless summer he had cursed the law's delay; but it held him, regardless, until the calm-eyed judge returned for the fall term of court. The jail was full to the last noisome cell-room and, caught with the rest, was Rimrock.

Yet if Rimrock had suffered there had been compensation—Mary Fortune had written him every day. He knew everything that Jepson was doing; and he knew a little more about her. But only a little; there was something about her that balked him a thousand times. She eluded him, she escaped him, she ignored his hot words; she was his friend, and yet only so far. She did not approve of what he was doing, and she had taken him at his word. He had asked her, once, not to interfere in his case; and from that day she kept her hands off.

The day of the trial came and Hassayamp Hicks, with L. W. and a host of friends, went to Geronimo

to cheer Rimrock by their presence. The papers came back full of the account of the case, but Mary Fortune did not appear in court. Even when the great day came when Rimrock was to make his appeal to the jury she remained in her office in Gunsight—and then came the telegram: "Acquitted!"

He had been right then, after all; he knew his own people! But then, there were other things, too. Mary Fortune was not so innocent that she had not noticed the strong interest which the newspapers had taken in his case. They had hailed him, in those last days, the first citizen of Geronimo County; and first citizens, as we know, are seldom hanged. The wonderful development of the Tecolote Mining Company had been heralded, month after month; and the name Rimrock Jones was always spoken with a reverence never given to criminals. He was the man with the vision, the big man of a big country, the man whose touch brought forth gold. And now he had won; his man-killing had been justified; and he was coming back—to see her.

She knew it. She even knew what he would hasten to say the first moment he found her alone. He was simple, in those matters; which made it all the more necessary to have the answer thought out in advance. But was life as simple as he insisted upon making it? Was every one either good or bad, and everything right or wrong? She doubted it, and the answer was somewhere in there. That he was a great man, she

agreed. In his crude, forceful way he had succeeded where most men would have failed; but was he not, after all, a great, thoughtless giant who went fighting his way through life, snatching up what he wanted most? And because his eyes were upon her, because she had come in his way, was that any reason why the traditions of her life should fall down and give way to his?

Even when the answer is "no" that is not any reason why a woman should not appear at her best. Mary Fortune met the train in an afternoon dress that had made an enemy of every woman in town. She had a friend in New York who picked them out for her, since her salary had become what it was. A great crowd was present—the whole populace of Gunsight was waiting to see their hero come home—and as the train rolled in and Rimrock dropped off, in the excitement she found tears in her eyes. But then, that was nothing; Woo Chong, the restaurant Chinaman, was weeping all over the place; and Old Hassayamp Hicks, hobbling off through the crowd, wiped his eyes and sobbed, unashamed. And then Rimrock seized her by both her hands and made her walk with him back to the hotel!

It was no time for discipline, that night; Rimrock was feeling too happy and gay. He would shake hands with a Mexican with equal enthusiasm, or a Chinaman, or a laborer off the railroad. They were all his friends, whether he knew them or not, and he

called on the whole town to celebrate. The Mexican string band that had met him at the train was chartered forthwith for the night, Woo Chong had an order to bring all the grub in town and feed it to the crowd at the hotel; but Hassayamp Hicks refused to take any man's money, he claimed that the drinks were on him. And so, with the band playing "Paloma" on the veranda and refreshments served free to the town, Rimrock Jones came back, the first citizen of Gunsight, and took up his life with a bang.

He stood in the rotunda of the Hotel Tecolote and gazed admiringly at the striped marble pillars that he had ordered at great expense, and his answer was always the same.

"Why, sure not! I knowed that jury wouldn't convict. I picked them myself by the look in their eye, and every man had to be ten years in the Territory. A fine bunch of men—every one of 'em square—they can have anything I've got. That's me! You know Rimrock! He never forgets his friends! And he don't forget his enemies, either!"

And then came the cheers, the shouts of his friends. The only enemy he had was dead.

Mary Fortune had a room on the second floor of the hotel—one of the nicest of them all, now that the painters and paperhangers had finally left—and she came down late in an evening gown. The marble steps, which Rimrock had insisted upon having, led up and then turned to both sides and as she came

down, smiling, with her ear-'phone left off and her hair in a glorious coil, Rimrock paused and his eyes grew big.

"By Joe, like that Queen picture!" he burst out impulsively and went bounding to meet her half way. And Mary Fortune heard him, in spite of her deafness; and understood—he meant the Empress Louise. He had seen that picture of the beloved Empress tripping daintily down the stairs and, for all she knew, those expensive marble steps might have been built to give point to the compliment.

"You sure look the part!" he said in her ear as he gallantly escorted her down. "And say, this hotel! Ain't it simply elegant? We'll show those Gunsight folks who's who!"

"They're consumed with envy!" she answered, smiling. "I mean the women, of course. I heard one of them say, just before I moved over, that you'd built it here just to spite them."

"That's right!" laughed Rimrock—"hello there, Porfilio—I built it just to make 'em look cheap. By grab, I'm an Injun and I won't soon forget the way they used to pass me by on the street. But now it's different—my name is Mister, and that's one bunch I never will know."

"They know *me*, now," she suggested slyly, "but I'm afraid I'm part Indian, too."

"You're right!" he said as he guided her through the crowd and led the way out into the street. "Let's

walk up and down—I don't dare to go out alone, or the boys will all get me drunk. But that's right," he went on, "I've been thinking it over—you can forgive, but you never forget."

"Well, perhaps so," she replied, "but I don't spend much of my time in planning out some elaborate revenge. Now those marble steps—do you know what Mr. Stoddard said when he came out to inspect the mine?"

"No, and what's more, I don't care," answered Rimrock lightly. "I'm fixed so I don't have to care. Mr. Stoddard is all right—he's a nice able provider, but we're running this mine, ourselves."

He squeezed her hand where she had slipped it through his arm and looked down with a triumphant smile.

"We, Us and Company!" he went on unctuously, "fifty-one per cent. of the stock!"

"Does Stoddard know that?" she asked him suddenly, looking up to read the words from his lips. "I noticed when he was here he treated me very politely, whereas Mr. Jepson didn't fare nearly so well."

"You bet he knows it," answered Rimrock explosively. "And Jepson will know it, too. The first thing I do will be to get rid of our dummy and make you a Director in the Company. I'm going to take charge here and your one per cent. of stock entitles you to a bona-fide place on the Board."

"Well, I'd think that over first," she advised after a silence, "because I foresee we sha'n't always agree. And if it's a dummy you want you'd better keep Mr. Buckbee. I'm fully capable of voting you down."

"No, I'll take a chance on it," he went on, smiling amiably. "All I ask is that you let me know. If you want to buck me, why, that's your privilege—you get a vote with me and Stoddard."

"Well, we'll talk that over," she said, laughing indulgently, "when you're not feeling so trustful and gay. This is one of those times I've heard you tell about when you feel like walking the wires. The morning after will be much more appropriate for considering an affair of this kind."

"No, I mean it!" he declared and then his face reddened. He had used that phrase before, and always at an unfortunate time. "Let's go back to the hotel," he burst out abruptly, "these boys are painting the town right."

They turned back down the street, where drunken revellers hailed their hero with cheers as he passed, and as they entered the hotel Rimrock carried her on till they had mounted to the ladies' balcony. This was located in the gallery where the ladies of the hotel could look down without being observed and for the space of an hour Rimrock leaned over the railing and gazed at the crowded rotunda. And as he gazed he talked, speaking close in her ear since he knew she had left off her 'phone; and all the time, as the people

thinned and dwindled, he strove to win her over to his mood.

He was, as she had said, in one of those expansive moods when his thoughts were lofty and grand. He opened up his heart and disclosed hopes and ambitions never before suspected by her; and as she listened it became apparent that she, Mary Fortune, was somehow involved in them all. Yet she let him talk on, for his presence was like wine to her, and his dreams as he told them seemed true. There was the trip to Europe—he alluded to it very tactfully—but he did not speak as if it were to be made alone.

And then he spoke of his plans for the Tecolote, and further conquests that would startle the world. There was Mexico, a vast treasure-house, barely scratched by the prospector; his star would soon lead him there. All he needed was patience, to wait the short time till the Tecolote began to pour out its ore. He asked her minutely of Jepson and his work and of her interview with the great Whitney H. Stoddard, and then he struck the stone rail with his knotted fist and told what would have to be done. And then at last, as the lights grew dim, he spoke of his long days in jail and how he had looked each day for her letter, which had never failed to come. His voice broke a little as he told of the trial and then he reached out and took her hand.

"I've learned from you," he said, leaning closer so she could hear him, "I've learned to understand. And

you like me; now, don't you? You can't tell me different because I can see it right there in your eye?"

She looked away, but she nodded her head, and her hand still lay quiet in his.

"Yes, I like you," she said. "I can't help but like you—but let's not say any more. Aren't you happy enough without always having things—can't you wait for some things in this world?"

"Yes, I can," he said. "I can wait for everything—the money, the success and all—but I can't wait for you! No, that's asking too much!"

He drew her towards him and his strong arm swept about her, but she straightened rebelliously in his clutch.

"Remember!" she warned and his arm relaxed though his breath was still hot on her cheek. "Now I must be going," she said, rising swiftly. "Good-night, Rimrock! I'm glad you're here!"

"Don't I get a kiss?" he demanded hoarsely as his hand reached again. "Come on," he pleaded. "Didn't I turn you loose? You kissed me once—in jail!"

"But you're free now, Rimrock, and—that makes a difference. You must learn to wait, and be friends."

"Oh—hell!" he burst out as she flitted away from him. But she was deaf—she turned back and smiled.

CHAPTER XIII

The Morning After

THE morning after found Rimrock without regrets and, for once, without a head. He had subtly judged, from something she had said, that Mary did not like whiskey breaths, nor strong cigars, nor the odors of the two combined. So, having certain words to speak in her ear, he had refrained, with the results as aforesaid. For the first time in her life she had looked him in the eye and acknowledged, frankly, that she liked him. But she had not kissed him—she drew the line there—and once more in his shrewd unsophisticated way he judged it was never done, in her set.

He found her in the office when he appeared the next morning, with her harness over her head. It was the sign in a way that she was strictly business and all personal confidences were taboo, but Rimrock did not take the hint. It annoyed him, some way, that drum over her ear and the transmitter hung on her breast, for when he had seen her the evening before all these things had been set aside.

"What? Still wearing that ear-thing?" he demanded bluffly and she flushed and drew her lips tight. It was

a way she had when she restrained some quick answer and Rimrock hastened on to explain. "You never wore it last night and—and you could hear every word I said."

"That was because I knew what you were going to say."

She smiled, imperceptibly, as she returned the retort courteous and now it was Rimrock who blushed. Then he laughed and waved the matter aside.

"Well, let it go at that," he said sitting down. "Gimme the books, I'm going to make you a director at our next meeting."

Mary Fortune looked at him curiously and smiled once more, then rose quickly and went to the safe.

"Very well," she said as she came back with the records, "but I wonder if you quite understand."

"You bet I do," he said, laying off his big hat and spreading out the papers and books. "Don't fool yourself there—we've got to be friends—and that's why I'm going the limit."

He searched out the certificate where, to qualify him for director, he had transferred one share of the Company stock to Buckbee, and filled in a date on the back.

"Now," he went on, "Mr. Buckbee's stock is cancelled, and his resignation automatically takes place. Friend Buckbee is all right, but dear friend W. H. Stoddard might use him to slip something over. It's We, Us and Company, you and me, little Mary, against

Whitney H. Stoddard and the world. Do you get the idea? We stand solid together—two directors out of three—and the Tecolote is in the hollow of our hand."

"Your hand!" she corrected but Rimrock protested and she let him have his way.

"No, now listen," he said; "this doesn't bind you to anything—all I want is that we shall be friends."

"And do you understand," she challenged, "that I can vote against you and throw the control to Stoddard? Have you stopped to think that I may have ideas that are diametrically opposed to your own? Have you even considered that we might fall out—as we did once before, you remember—and that then I could use this against you?"

"I understand all that—and more besides," he said as he met her eyes. "I want you, Mary. My God, I'm crazy for you. The whole mine is nothing to me now."

"Oh, yes, it is," she said, but her voice trailed off and she thought for a minute in silence.

"Very well," she said, "you have a right to your own way—but remember, this still leaves me free."

"You know it!" he exclaimed, "as the desert wind! Shake hands on it—we're going to be friends!"

"I hope so," she said, "but sometimes I'm afraid. We must wait a while and be sure."

"Ah, 'wait'!" he scolded. "But I don't like that word—but come on, let's get down to business.

Where's this Abercrombie Jepson? I want to talk to him, and then we'll go out to the mine."

He grabbed up his hat and began to stride about the office, running his hand lovingly over the polished mahogany furniture, and Mary Fortune spoke a few words into the phone.

"He'll be here in a minute," she said and began to straighten out the papers on her desk. Even to Rimrock Jones, who was far from systematic, it was evident that she knew her work. Every paper was put back in its special envelope, and when Abercrombie Jepson came in from his office she had the bundle back in the safe.

He was a large man, rather fat and with a ready smile, but with a harried look in his eye that came from handling a thousand details; and as Rimrock turned and faced him he blinked, for he felt something was coming.

"Mr. Jepson," began Rimrock in his big, blustering voice, "I want to have an understanding with you. You're a Stoddard man, but I think you're competent —you certainly have put things through. But here's the point—I've taken charge now and you get your orders from me. You can forget Mr. Stoddard. I'm president and general manager, and whatever I say goes."

He paused and looked Jepson over very carefully while Mary Fortune stared.

"Very well, sir," answered Jepson, "I think I

understand you. I hope you are satisfied with my services?"

"We'll see about that later," went on Rimrock, still arrogantly. "I'll begin my tour of inspection to-day. But I'll tell you right now, so there won't be any mistake, that all I ask of you is results. You won't find me kicking about the money you spend as long as it comes back in ore. You're a competent man, so I've been given to understand, and, inside your field, you're the boss. I won't fire any of your men and I won't interfere with your work without having it done through you; but on the other hand, don't you forget for a single minute that I'm the big boss on this dump. And whatever you do, don't make the mistake of thinking you're working for Stoddard. I guess that will be all. Miss Fortune is going to be a director soon and I've asked her to go out with us to the mine."

A strange, startled look came over Jepson's face as he received this last bit of news, but he smiled and murmured his congratulations. Then he expressed the hope that he would be able to please them and withdrew with the greatest haste.

"Well!" observed Rimrock as he gazed grimly after him, "I guess that will hold Mr. Jepson."

"Very likely," returned Mary, "but as a prospective director may I enquire the reason for this outburst?"

"You may," replied Rimrock. "This man, Aber-

crombie Jepson, was put over on me by Stoddard. I had to concede something, after holding out on the control, and I agreed he could name the supe. Well now, after being the whole show, don't you think it more than likely that Mr. Jepson might overlook the main squeeze—me?"

He tapped himself on the breast and nodded his head significantly.

"That's it," he went on as she smiled enigmatically. "I know these great financiers. I'll bet you right now our fat friend Abercrombie is down telegraphing the news to Stoddard. He's Stoddard's man but I've got my eye on him and if he makes a crooked move, it's bingo!"

"All the same," defended Mary, "while I don't like him personally, I think Jepson is remarkably efficient. And when you consider his years of experience and the technical knowledge he has——"

"That has nothing to do with it, as far as I'm concerned—there are other men just as good for the price—but I want him to understand so he won't forget it that he's taking his orders from *me*. Now I happen to know that our dear friend Stoddard is out to get control of this mine and the very man that is liable to ditch us is this same efficient Mr. Jepson. Don't ever make the mistake of giving these financiers the credit of being on the level. You can't grab that much money in the short time they've been gathering without gouging every man you meet. So just watch this

man Jepson. Keep your eye on his accounts, and remember—we're pardners, now."

His big, excited eyes, that blazed with primitive emotion whenever he roused from his calm, became suddenly gentle and he patted her hand as he hurried off to order up the car.

All the way across the desert, as Mary exclaimed at the signs of progress, Rimrock let it pass in silence. They left the end of the railroad and a short automobile ride put them down at the Tecolote camp. Along the edge of the canyon, where the well-borers had developed water, the framework of a gigantic mill and concentrator was rapidly being rushed to completion. On the flats below, where Old Juan's burros had browsed on the scanty mesquite, were long lines of houses for the miners and a power plant to run the great stamps. A big gang of miners were running cuts into the hillside where the first of the ore was to come out and like a stream of ants the workmen and teams swarmed about each mighty task, but still Rimrock Jones remained silent. His eyes opened wider at sight of each new miracle but to Jepson he made no comments.

They went to the assay house, where the diamond drill cores showed the ore from the heart of the hills; and there at last Rimrock found his tongue as he ran over the assayer's reports.

"Pretty good," he observed and this time it was Jepson who tightened his lips and said nothing.

"Pretty good," repeated Rimrock and then he laughed silently and went out and sat down on the hill. "A mountain of copper," he said, looking upward. "The whole butte is nothing but ore. Some rich, some low-grade, but shattered—that's the idea! You can scoop it up with a steam shovel."

He whistled through his teeth, cocking his eye up at the mountain and then looking down at the town-site.

"You bet—a big camp!" And then to Jepson: "That's fine, Mr. Jepson; you're doing noble. By the way, when will that cook-house be done? Pretty soon, eh? Well, let me know; I've got a friend that's crazy to move in."

He smiled at Mary, who thought at once of Woo Chong, but Jepson looked suddenly serious.

"I hope, Mr. Jones," he said, "you're not planning to bring in that Chinaman. I've got lots of Bisbee men among my miners and they won't stand for a Chinaman in camp."

"Oh, yes, they will," answered Rimrock easily. "You wait, it'll be all right. And there's another thing, now I think about it; Mr. Hicks will be out soon to look for a good place to locate his saloon. I've given him the privilege of selling all the booze that is sold in Tecolote."

"Booze?" questioned Jepson, and then he fell silent and went to gnawing his lip.

"Yes—booze!" repeated Rimrock. "I know these

Cousin Jacks. They've got to have facilities for spending their money or they'll quit you and go to town."

"Well, now really, Mr. Jones," began Jepson earnestly, "I'd much prefer to have a dry camp. Of course you are right about the average miner—but it's better not to have them drunk around camp."

"Very likely," said Rimrock, "but Old Hassayamp is coming and I guess you can worry along. It's a matter of friendship with me, Mr. Jepson—I never go back on a friend. When I was down and out Old Hassayamp Hicks was the only man that would trust me for the drinks; and Woo Chong, the Chinaman, was the only man that would trust me for a meal. You see how it is, and I hope you'll do your best to make them both perfectly at home."

Abercrombie Jepson mumbled something into his mustache which Rimrock let pass for assent, although it was plainly to be seen by the fire in his eye that the superintendent was vexed. As for Mary Fortune, she sat at one side and pretended not to hear. Perhaps Rimrock was right and these first minor clashes were but skirmishes before a great battle. Perhaps, after all, Jepson was there to oppose him and it was best to ride over him roughshod. But it seemed on the surface extremely dictatorial, and against public policy as well. Mr. Jepson was certainly right, in her opinion, in his attitude toward Hicks' saloon; yet she knew it was hopeless to try to move Rimrock, so she smiled and let them talk on.

"Now, there's another matter," broke in Jepson aggressively, "that I've been waiting to see you about. As I understand it, I'm Mr. Stoddard's representative —I represent his interests in the mine. Very good; that's no more than right. Now, Mr. Stoddard has invested a large amount of money to develop these twenty claims, but he feels, and I feel, that that Old Juan claim is a continual menace to them all."

At the mention of the Old Juan Rimrock turned his head, and Mary could see his jaw set; but he listened somberly for some little time as Jepson went on with his complaint.

"You must know, Mr. Jones, that the history of the Old Juan makes it extremely liable to be jumped. We've had a strong guard set ever since you—well, continuously—but the title to that claim must be cleared up. It ought to be re-located——"

"Don't you think it!" sneered Rimrock with a sudden insulting stare. "That claim will stay—just the way it is!"

"But the guards!" protested Jepson, "they're a continual expense——"

"You can tell 'em to come down," cut in Rimrock peremptorily. "I'll look after that claim myself."

"But why not re-locate it?" cried Jepson in a passion, "why expose us to this continual suspense? You can re-locate it yourself——"

"Mr. Jepson," began Rimrock, speaking through his teeth, "there's no one that questions my claim. But

if any man does—I don't care who he is—he's welcome to try and jump it. All he'll have to do is whip me."

He was winking angrily and Jepson, after a silence, cast an appealing glance at Mary Fortune.

"You've got a wonderful property here," he observed, speaking generally, "the prospects are very bright. There's only one thing that can mar its success, and that is litigation!"

"Yes," cried Rimrock, "and that's just what you'd bring on by your crazy re-location scheme! That Old Juan claim is good—I killed a man to prove it—and I'm not going to back down on it now. It won't be re-located and the man that jumps it will have me to deal with, personally. Now if you don't like the way I'm running this proposition——"

"Oh, it isn't that!" broke in Jepson hastily, "but I'm hired, in a way, to advise. You must know, Mr. Jones, that you're jeopardizing our future by refusing to re-locate that claim."

"No, I don't!" shouted Rimrock, jumping fiercely to his feet, while Mary Fortune turned pale. "It's just the other way. That claim is good—I know it's good—and I'll fight for it every time. Your courts are nothing, you can hire a lawyer to take any side of any case, but you can't hire one to go up against this!" He patted a lump that bulged at his hip and shook a clenched fist in the air. "No, sir! No law for me! Don't you ever think that I'll stand for re-locating that claim. That would be just the chance

that these law-sharps are looking for, to start a contest and tie up the mine. No, leave it to me. I'll be my own law and, believe me, I'll never be jumped. There are some people yet that remember Andrew McBain——"

He stopped, for Mary had risen from her place and stood facing him with blazing eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked, like a man bewildered; and then he understood. Mary Fortune had worked for Andrew McBain, she had heard him threaten his life; and, since his acquittal, this was the first time his name had been mentioned. And he remembered with a start that after he came back from the killing she had refused to take his hand.

"What's the matter?" he repeated, but she set her lips and moved away down the hill. Rimrock stood and watched her, then he turned to Jepson and his voice was hoarse with hate.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied!" he said and strode savagely off down the trail.

CHAPTER XIV

Rimrock Explains

IT had not taken long, after his triumphant homecoming, for Rimrock to wreck his own happiness. That old rift between them, regarding the law, had been opened the very first day; and it was not a difference that could be explained and adjusted, for neither would concede they were wrong. As the daughter of a judge, conservatively brought up in a community where an outlaw was abhorred, Mary Fortune could no more agree to his program than he could agree to hers. She respected the law and she turned to the law, instinctively, to right every wrong; but he from sad experience knew what a broken reed it was, compared to his gun and his good right hand.

The return to Gunsight was a gloomy affair, but nothing was said of the Old Juan. Abercrombie Jepson guessed, and rightly, that his company was not desired; and they who had set out with the joy of lovers rode back absent-minded and distrait. But the question of the Old Juan was a vital problem, involving other interests beside theirs, and in the morning there was a telegram from Whitney H. Stoddard requesting that the matter be cleared up. Rimrock

read it in the office where Mary sat at work and threw it carelessly down on her desk.

"Well, it's come to a showdown," he said as she glanced at it. "The question is—who's running this mine?"

"And the answer?" she enquired in that impersonal way she had; and Rimrock started as he sensed the subtle challenge.

"Why—*we* are!" he said bluffly. "You and me, of course. You wouldn't quit me on a proposition like this?"

"Yes, I think I would," she answered unhesitatingly. "I think Mr. Stoddard is right. That claim should be located in such a manner as to guarantee that it won't be jumped."

"Uh! You think so, eh? Well, what do you know about it? Can't you take my word for anything?"

"Why, yes, I can. In most matters at the mine I think you're entitled to have your way. But if you elect me as a Director in this coming stockholders' meeting and this question comes before the Board, unless you can make me see it differently I'm likely to vote against you."

Rimrock shoved his big hat to the back of his head and stood gazing at her fixedly.

"Well, if that's the case," he suggested at last, and then stopped as she caught his meaning.

"Very well," she said, "it isn't too late. You can get you another dummy."

"Will you vote for him?" demanded Rimrock, after an instant's thought, and she nodded her head in assent.

"Well, dang my heart!" muttered Rimrock impatiently, pacing up and down the room. "Here I frame it all up for us two to get together and run the old Company right and the first thing comes up we split right there and pull off a quarrel to boot. I don't like this, Mary; I want to agree with you; I want to get where we can understand. Now let me explain to you why it is I'm holding out; and then you can have you say-so, too. When I was in jail I sent for Juan Soto and it's true—he was born in Mexico. But his parents, so he says, were born south of Tucson and that makes them American citizens. Now, according to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo if any citizen of Mexico moves to the United States, unless he moves back or gives notice within five years of his intention of returning to Mexico he becomes automatically an American citizen. Do you get the idea? Even if Juan was born in Mexico he's never considered himself a Mexican citizen. He moved back with his folks when he was a little baby, took the oath when he came of age and has been voting the Democratic ticket ever since. But here's another point—even if he is a Mexican, no private citizen can jump his claim. The Federal Government can, but I happen to know that no ordinary citizen can take possession of a foreigner's claim. It's been done. of

course, but that lawyer I consulted told me it wasn't according to Hoyle. And here's another point—but what are you laughing at? Ain't I laying the law down right?"

"Why, yes, certainly," conceded Mary, "but with all this behind you what's the excuse for defying the law? Why don't you tell Mr. Jepson, or Mr. Stoddard, that the Old Juan is a perfectly good claim?"

"I did!" defended Rimrock. "I told Jepson so yesterday. I used those very same words!"

"Yes, but with another implication. You let it be understood that the reason it was good was that *you* were there, with your gun!"

"Stop right there!" commanded Rimrock. "That's the last, ultimate reason that holds in a court of law! The code is nothing, the Federal law is nothing, even treaties are nothing! The big thing that counts is—possession. Until that claim is recorded it's the only reason. The man that holds the ground, owns it. And that's why I say, and I stand pat on it yet, that my gun outweighs all the law!"

"Well, I declare," gasped Mary, "you are certainly convincing! Why didn't you tell *me* about it yesterday?"

"Well," began Rimrock, and then he hesitated, "I knew it would bring up—well, another matter, and I don't want to talk about that, yet."

"Yes, I understand," said Mary very hastily, "but—why didn't you tell Jepson this? I may do you an

injustice but it seemed to me you were seeking a quarrel. But if you had explained the case——"

"What? To Stoddard's man? Why, you must think I'm crazy. Jepson has hired a lawyer and looked up that claim to the last infinitesimal hickey; he knows more about the Old Juan than I do. And speaking about quarrels, don't you know that fellow deliberately framed the whole thing? He wanted to know just where I stood on the Old Juan—and he wanted to get me in bad with you."

"With me?"

"Yes, with you! Why, can't you see his game? If he can get you to throw your vote against me he can knock me out of my control. Add your stock to Stoddard's and it makes us fifty-fifty—a deadlock, with Jepson in charge. And if he thought for a minute that I couldn't fire him he'd thumb his nose in my face."

Mary smiled at this picture of primitive defiance in a battle of grown-up men and yet she saw dimly that Rimrock was right in his estimate of Jepson's motives. Jepson did have a way that was subtly provocative and his little eyes were shifty, like a boxer's. As the two men faced each other she could feel the antagonism in every word that they said; and, looking at it as he did, it seemed increasingly reasonable that Rimrock's way was the best. It was better just to fight back without showing his hand and let Jepson guess what he could.

"But if we'd stand together—" she began at last and Rimrock's face lit up.

"That's it!" he said, leaping forward with his hand out, "will you shake on it? You know I'm all right!"

"But not *always* right," she answered smiling, and put her hand in his. "But you're honest, anyway; and I like you for that. It's agreed, then; we stand together!"

"No-ow, that's the talk!" grinned Rimrock approvingly, "and besides, I need you, little Mary."

He held on to her hand but she wrested it away and turned blushing to her work.

"Don't be foolish!" she said, but her feelings were not hurt for she was smiling again in a minute. "Don't you know," she confided, "I feel utterly helpless when it comes to this matter of the mine. Everything about it seems so absolutely preposterous that I'm glad I'm not going to be a Director."

"But you are!" came back Rimrock, "now don't tell me different; because you're bull-headed, once you've put yourself on record. There ain't another living soul that I can trust to take that directorship. Even Old Hassayamp down here—and I'd trust him anywhere —might get drunk and vote the wrong way. But you——"

"You don't know me yet," she replied with decision. "I won't get drunk, but I've got to be convinced. And if you can't convince me that your way is right—and reasonable and just, as well—I give you notice

that I'll vote against you. Now! What are you going to say?"

"All right!" he answered promptly, "that's all I ask of you. If you think I'm wrong you're welcome to vote against me; but believe me, this is no Sunday-school job. There's a big fight coming on, I can feel it in my bones, and the best two-handed scrapper wins. Old W. H. Stoddard, when he had me in jail and was hoping I was going to be sent up, he tried to buy me out of this mine. He started at nothing and went up to twenty million, so you can guess how much it's worth."

"Twenty million!" she echoed.

"Yes; twenty million—and that ain't a tenth of what he might be willing to pay. Can you think that big? Two hundred million dollars? Well then, imagine that much money thrown down on the desert for him and me to fight over. Do you think it's possible to be pleasant and polite, and always reasonable and just, when you're fighting a man that's never quit yet, for a whole danged mountain of copper?" He rose up and shook himself and swelled out his chest and then looked at her and smiled. "Just remember that, in the days that are coming, and give me the benefit of the doubt."

"But I don't believe it!" she exclaimed incredulously. "What ground have you for that valuation of the mine?"

"Well, his offer, for one thing," answered Rimrock

soberly. "He never pays what a thing is worth. But did you see Mr. Jepson when I went into the assay house and began looking at those diamond-drill cores? He was sore, believe me, and the longer I stayed there the more fidgety Jepson got. That ore assay's big, but the thing that I noticed is that *all* of it carries some values. You can begin at the foot of it and work that whole mountain and every cubic foot would pay. And that peacock ore, that copper glance! That runs up to forty per cent. Now, here's a job for you as secretary of the Company, a little whirl into the higher mathematics. Just find the cubic contents of Tecolote mountain and multiply it by three per cent. That's three per cent. copper, and according to those assays the whole ground averages that. Take twenty claims, each fifteen hundred feet long, five hundred feet across and say a thousand feet deep; pile the mountain on top of them, take copper at eighteen cents a pound and give me the answer in dollars and cents. Then figure it out another way—figure out the human cussedness that that much copper will produce."

"Why—really!" cried Mary as she sat staring at him, "you make me almost afraid."

"And you can mighty well be so," he answered grimly. "It gets me going sometimes. Sometimes I get a hunch that I'll take all my friends and go and camp right there on the Old Juan. Just go out there with guns and hold her down, but that ain't the way it should be done. The minute you show these wolves

you're afraid they'll fly at your throat in a pack. The thing to do is to look 'em in the eye and keep your gun kind of handy, so."

He tapped the old pistol that he still wore under his coat and leaned forward across her desk.

"Now tell me this," he said. "Knowing what you know now, does it seem so plain criminal—what I did to that robber, McBain?"

Mary met his eyes and in spite of her the tears came as she read the desperate longing in his glance. He was asking for justification after those long months of silence, but his deed was abhorrent to her still. She had shuddered when he had touched that heavy pistol whose shot had snuffed out a man's life; and she shuddered when she thought of it, when she saw his great hand and the keen eyes that had looked death at McBain. And yet, now he asked it, it no longer seemed criminal, only brutal and murderous—and violent. It was that which she feared in him, much as she was won by his other qualities, his instinctive resort to violence. But when he asked if she considered it plain criminal she was forced to answer him:

"No!"

"Well, then, what is the reason you always keep away from me and look like you didn't approve? Ain't a man got a right, if he's crowded too far, to stand up and fight for his own? Would you think any better of me if I'd quit in the pinch and let McBain get away with my mine? Wasn't he just a plain

robber, only without the nerve, hiring gun-fighters to do the rough work? Why, Mary, I feel proud, every time I think about it, that I went there and did what I did. I feel like a man that has done a great duty and I can't stand it to have you disapprove. When I killed McBain I served notice on everybody that no man can steal from me, not even if he hides behind the law. And now, with all this coming up, I want you to tell me I did right!"

He thrust out his big head and fixed her eyes fiercely, but she slowly shook her head.

"No," she said, "I can never say that. I think there was another way."

"But I tried that before, when he robbed me of the Gunsight. My God, you wouldn't have me go to law!"

"You didn't need to go to law," she answered, suddenly flaring up in anger. "I warned you in plenty of time. All you had to do was to go to your property and be there to warn him away."

"Aw, you don't understand!" he cried in an agony. "Didn't I warn him to keep away? Didn't I come to his office when you were right there and tell him to keep off my claims? What more could I do? But he went out there anyhow, and after that there was nothing to do but fight!"

"Well, I'm glad you're satisfied," she said after a silence. "Let's talk about something else."

"No, let's fight this out!" he answered insistently. "I want you to understand."

"I do," she replied. "I know just how you feel. But unfortunately I see it differently."

"Well, how do you see it? Just tell me how you feel and see if I can't prove I'm right."

"No, it can't be proved. It goes beyond that. It goes back to the way we've been brought up. My father was a judge and he worshiped the law—you men out West are different."

"Yes, you bet we are. We don't worship any law unless, by grab, it's right. Why, there used to be a law, a hundred years ago, to hang a man if he stole. They used to hang them by the dozen, right over there in England, and put their heads on a spike. Could you worship that law? Why, no; you know better. But there's a hundred more laws on our statute books to-day that date clear back to that time, and lots of them are just as unreasonable. I believe in justice, and every man for his own rights, and some day I believe you'll agree with me."

"That isn't necessary," she said, smiling slightly, "we can proceed very nicely without."

"Aw, now, that's what I mean," he went on appealingly. "We can proceed, but I want more than that. I want you to like me—and approve of what I do—and love and marry me, too."

He poured it out hurriedly and reached blindly to catch her, but she rose up and slipped way.

"No, Rimrock," she said as she gazed back at him from a distance, "you want too much—all at once.

To love and to marry are serious things, they make or mar a woman's whole life. I didn't come out here with the intention of marrying and I have no such intention yet. And to win a woman's love—may I tell you something? It can never be done by violence. You may take that big pistol and win a mountain of copper that is worth two hundred million dollars, but love doesn't come that way. You say you want me now, but to-morrow may be different. And you must remember, you are likely to be rich."

"Yes, and that's why I want you!" burst out Rimrock impulsively. "You can keep me from blowing my money."

"Absolutely convincing—from the man's point of view. But what about the woman's? And if that's all you want you don't have to have me. You'll find lots of other girls just as capable."

"No, but look! I mean it! I've got to have you—we can throw in our stock together!"

There was a startled pause, in which each stared at the other as if wondering what had happened, and then Mary Fortune smiled. It was a very nice smile, with nothing of laughter in it, but it served to recall Rimrock to his senses.

"I think I know what you mean," she said at last, "but don't you think you've said enough? I like you just as much; but really, Rimrock, you're not very good at explaining."

CHAPTER XV

A Game for Big Stakes

THE next thirty days—before the stockholders' meeting—were spent by Rimrock in trying to explain. In spite of her suggestion that he was not good at that art he insisted upon making things worse. What he wanted to say was that the pooling of their stock would be a happy—though accidental—resultant of their marriage; what he actually said was that they ought to get married because then they would stand together against Stoddard. But Mary only listened with a wise, sometimes wistful, smile and assured him he was needlessly alarmed. It was that which drove him on—that wistful, patient smile. Somehow he felt, if he could only say the right words, she would lean right over and kiss him!

But those words were never spoken. Rimrock was worried and harassed and his talk became more and more practical. He was quarreling with Jepson, who stood upon his rights; and Stoddard had served notice that he would attend the meeting in person, which meant it had come to a showdown. So the month dragged by until at last they sat together in the mahogany-furnished Directors' room. Rimrock sat at the head of the polished table with Mary Fortune

near by, and Stoddard and Buckbee opposite. As the friend of all parties—and the retiring Director—Buckbee had come in the interest of peace; or so he claimed, but how peace would profit him was a question hard to decide. It might seem, in fact, that war would serve better; for brokers are the sharks in the ocean of finance and feed and fatten where the battle is fiercest.

Whitney Stoddard sat silent, a tall, nervous man with a face lined deep with care, and as he waited for the conflict he tore off long strips of paper and pinched them carefully into little square bits. Elwood Buckbee smiled genially, but his roving eye rested fitfully on Mary Fortune. He was a dashing young man of the Beau Brummel type and there was an ease and grace in his sinuous movements that must have fluttered many a woman's heart. But now he, too, sat silent and his appraising glances were disguised in a general smile.

"Well, let's get down to business," began Rimrock, after the preliminaries. "The first thing is to elect a new Director. Mr. Buckbee here has been retired and I nominate Mary Fortune to fill the vacancy."

"Second the motion," rapped out Stoddard and for a moment Rimrock hesitated before he took the fatal plunge. He knew very well that, once elected to the directorship, he could never remove her by himself. Either her stock or Stoddard's would have to go into the balance to undo the vote of that day.

"All in favor say 'Ay!'"

"Ay!" said Stoddard grimly; and Rimrock paused again.

"Ay!" he added and as Mary wrote it down she felt the eyes of both of them upon her. The die had been cast and from that moment on she was the arbiter of all their disputes.

They adjourned, as stockholders, and reconvened immediately as Directors; and the first matter that came up was a proposition from Buckbee to market a hundred million shares of common stock.

"You have here," he said, "a phenomenal property—one that will stand the closest of scrutiny; and with the name of Whitney H. Stoddard behind it. More than that, you are on the eve of an enormous production at a time when copper is going up. It is selling now for over eighteen cents and within a year it will be up in the twenties. Within a very few months, unless I am mistaken, there will be a battle royal in the copper market. The Hackmeister interests have had copper tied up, but the Tecolote Company can break that combine and at the same time gain an enormous prestige. There will be a fight, of course, but this stock will cost you nothing and you can retain a controlling share. My proposition is simply that you issue the common and divide it pro rata among you, your present stock then becoming preferred. Then you can put your common on the market in such lots as you wish and take your profits at the

crest. In conclusion let me say that I will handle all you offer at the customary broker's charge."

He sat down and Rimrock looked out from under his eyebrows at Stoddard and Mary Fortune.

"Very well," said Stoddard after waiting for a moment. "It's agreeable to me, I'm sure."

"I'm against it," declared Rimrock promptly. "I'm against any form of reorganization. I'm in favor of producing copper and taking our profits from that."

"But this is plain velvet," protested Buckbee, smilingly. "It's just like money picked up in the road. I don't think I know of any company of importance that hasn't done something of the kind."

"I'm against it," repeated Rimrock in his stubborn way and all eyes were turned upon Mary Fortune. She sat very quiet, but her anxious, lip-reading gaze shifted quickly from one to the other.

"Did you get that, Miss Fortune?" asked Buckbee suavely, "the proposition is to issue a hundred million shares of common and start them at, say, ten cents a share. Then by a little manipulation we can raise them to twenty and thirty, and from that on up to a dollar. At that price, of course, you can unload if you wish: I'll keep you fully informed."

"Yes, I understood it," she answered, "but I'm not in favor of it. I think all stock gambling is wrong."

"You—*what?*" exclaimed Buckbee, and Whitney H. Stoddard was so astounded that he was compelled to unmask. His cold, weary eyes became predatory and

eager and a subtle, scornful smile twisted his lips. Even Rimrock was surprised, but he leaned back easily and gave her a swift, approving smile. She was with him, that was enough; let the stock gamblers rage. He had won in the very first bout.

"But my dear Miss Fortune," began Stoddard, still smiling, "do you realize what you have done? You have rejected a profit, at the very least, of one or two million dollars."

"That may be," she said, "but I prefer not to take it unless we give something in return."

"But we do!" broke in Buckbee, "that stock is legitimate. The people that buy in will get rich."

"But the people who buy last will lose," she said. "I know, because I did it myself."

"Oho!" began Buckbee, but at a glance from Stoddard he drew back and concealed his smirk. Then for half an hour with his most telling arguments and the hypnotic spell of his eyes Whitney Stoddard outdid himself to win her over while Rimrock sat by and smiled. He had tried that himself in days gone by and he knew Stoddard was wasting his breath. She had made up her mind and that was the end of it—there would be no Tecolote common. Even Stoddard saw at last that his case was hopeless and he turned to the next point of attack. Rimrock Jones, he knew, opposed him on general principles—but the girl as a matter of conscience. They would see if that conscience could not be utilized.

"Very well," he said, "I'll withdraw my motion. Let us take up this matter of the saloon."

"What saloon?" demanded Rimrock, suddenly alert and combative, and Stoddard regarded him censoriously.

"I refer," he said, "to the saloon at the camp, which you have put there in spite of Jepson's protests. Now outside the question of general policy—the effect on the men, the increase in accidents and the losses that are sure to result—I wish to protest, and to protest most vigorously, against having a whiskey camp. I want the Tecolote to draw the best type of men, men of family who will make it their home, and I think it's a sin under circumstances like this to poison their lives with rum. I could speak on this further, but I simply make a motion that Tecolote be kept a temperance camp."

He paused and met Rimrock's baleful glance with a thin-lipped fighting smile; and then the battle was on. There were hot words in plenty and mutual recrimination, but Stoddard held the high moral ground. He stuck to his point that employers had no right to profit by the downfall of their men; and when it came to the vote, without a moment's hesitation, Mary Fortune cast her vote with his.

"What's that?" yelled Rimrock, rising up black with anger and striking a great blow on the table. "Have I got to tell Hassayamp to go? This old friend of mine that helped me and staked me when nobody else

would trust me? Then I resign, by grab. If I can't do a little thing like that, I'm going to quit! Right now! You can get another manager! I resign! Now vote on it! You've got to accept it or——"

"I accept it!" said Stoddard and a wild look crossed Rimrock's face as he saw where his impetuosity had led him. But Mary Fortune, with an understanding smile, shook her head and voted no.

"How do *you* vote?" challenged Stoddard, trying to spur him to the leap, but Rimrock had sensed the chasm.

"I vote *no!*" he said with answering scowl. "I'll take care of Mr. Hicks, myself. You must take me for a sucker," he added as an afterthought, but Stoddard was again wearing his mask. It was Buckbee who indulged in the laugh.

"We can't all win," he said, rising up to go. "Think of me and that Tecolote common!"

Rimrock grinned, but Stoddard had come there for a purpose and he did not choose to unbend.

"Mr. Jones," he began, as they were left alone, "I see we are not able to agree. Every point that I bring up you oppose it on general principles. Have you any suggestions for the future?"

"Why, yes," returned Rimrock, "since I'm in control I suggest that you leave me alone. I know what you'd like—you'd like to have me play dead, and let you and Jepson run the mine. But if you've got enough, if you want to get out, I might take that stock off your hands."

A questioning flash came into Stoddard's keen eyes.

"In what way?" he enquired cautiously.

"Well, just place a value on it, whatever you think it's worth, and we'll get right down to business." Rimrock hitched up his trousers, and the square set of his shoulders indicated his perfect willingness to begin. "You're not the only man," he went on importantly, "that's got money to put into mines."

"Perhaps not," admitted Stoddard, "but you take too much for granted if you think I can be bought out for a song."

"Oh, no," protested Rimrock, "I don't think anything like that. I expect you to ask a good price. Yes, a big price. But figure it out, now, what you've put into the mine and a reasonable return for your risk. Then multiply it by five, or ten, or twenty, whatever you think it's worth, and make me an offer on paper."

"Not at all! Not at all!" rapped out Stoddard hastily, "I'm in the market to buy."

"Well, then, make me an offer," said Rimrock bluffly, "or Miss Fortune here, if she'd like to sell. Here, I'll tell you what you do—you name me a figure that you'll either buy at, or sell! Now, that's fair, ain't it?"

A fretful shadow came over Stoddard's face as he found himself still on the defense and he sought to change his ground.

"I'll tell you frankly why I make this offer—it's

on account of the Old Juan claim. If you had shown any tendency to be in the least reasonable I'd be the last to propose any change——"

"Never mind about that," broke in Rimrock peremptorily, "I'll take your word for all that. The question is—what's your price?"

"I don't want to sell!" snapped out Stoddard peevishly, "but I'll give you twenty million dollars for your hundred thousand shares of stock."

"You offered that before," countered Rimrock coolly, "when I was shut up in the County Jail. But I'm out again now and I guess you can see I don't figure on being stung."

"I'll give you thirty million," said Stoddard, speaking slowly, "and not a dollar more."

"Will you sell out for that?" demanded Rimrock instantly. "Will you take *forty* for what you hold? You won't? Then what are you offering it to me for? Haven't I got the advantage of control?"

"Well, perhaps you have," answered Stoddard doubtfully and turned and looked straight at Mary. "Miss Fortune," he said, "I don't know you intimately, but you seem to be a reasonable woman. May I ask at this time whether it is your present intention to hold your stock, or to sell?"

"I intend to hold my stock," replied Mary very quietly, "and to vote it whichever way seems best."

"Then am I to understand that you don't follow

Mr. Jones blindly, and that he has no control over your stock?"

Mary nodded, but as Stoddard leaned forward with an offer she hurried on to explain.

"But at the same time," she said in her gentlest manner and with a reassuring glance at her lover, "when we think what hardships Mr. Jones had endured in order to find this mine, and all he has been through since, I think it is no more than right that he should remain in control."

"Aha! I see!" responded Stoddard cynically, "may I enquire if you young people have an understanding?"

"That is none of your business," she answered sharply, but the telltale blush was there.

"Ah, yes, excuse me," murmured Stoddard playfully, "a lady might well hesitate—with him!"

He cast a teasing glance in the direction of Rimrock and perceived he had guessed right again. "Well, well," he hurried on, "that does make a difference—it's the most uncertain element in the game. But all this aside, may I ask you young people if you have a top price for your stock. I don't suppose I can meet it, but it's no harm to mention it. Don't be modest—whatever it is!"

"A hundred million dollars!" spoke up Rimrock promptly, "that's what I value my share of the mine."

"And you?" began Stoddard with a quizzical smile, but Mary seemed not to hear. It was a way she had, when a thing was to be avoided; but Stoddard raised

his voice. "And you, Miss Fortune?" he called insistently. "How much do you want for your stock?"

She glanced up, startled, then looked at Rimrock and dropped her eyes to the table.

"I don't wish to sell," she answered quietly and the two men glared at each other.

"Mr. Jones," began Stoddard in the slow, measured tones of a priest who invokes the only god he knows, "I'm a man of few words—now you can take this or leave it. I'll give you—fifty—million—dollars!"

"Nothing doing!" answered Rimrock. "I don't want to sell. Will you take fifty millions for yours?"

For a moment Stoddard hesitated, then his face became set and his voice rasped harshly in his throat.

"No!" he said. "I came here to buy. And you'll live to wish you had sold!"

"Like hell!" retorted Rimrock. "This has been my day. I'll know where I'm at, from now on."

CHAPTER XVI

The Tiger Lady

THE winter came on with its rains and soft verdure and desert shrubs bursting with bloom and, for a man who professed to know just exactly where he was at, Rimrock Jones was singularly distrait. When he cast down the glove to Whitney H. Stoddard, that glutton for punishment who had never quit yet, he had looked for something to happen. Each morning he rose up with the confident expectation of hearing that the Old Juan was jumped; but that high, domelike butte remained as lifeless as ever, without a single guard to herd the apex claim. Then he fell to watching Jepson and talking to the miners and snooping for some hidden scheme, but Jepson went ahead with his machine-like efficiency until the Tecolote began to turn out ore.

Day and night the low thunder of the powerful batteries told of the milling of hundreds of tons; and the great concentrator, sprawling down on the broad hillside, washed out the copper and separated it from the muck. Long trains of steel ore-cars received the precious concentrates and bore them off to the distant smelters, and at last there came the day when the

steady outpay ceased and the money began to pile up in the bank. L. W.'s bank, of course; for since the fatal fight he had been Rimrock's banker and bosom friend. But that ended the long wait. At the sight of all that money Rimrock Jones began to spend.

For a year and more Rimrock had been careful and provident—that is, careful and provident for him. Six months of that time had been spent in the County Jail, and since then he had been watching Stoddard. But now Whitney H. Stoddard—and Jepson, too—were uniformly polite and considerate. There was no further question—whatever Rimrock ordered was done and charged up to the Company. That had been Stoddard's payment for his share of the mine, and now the money was pouring back. Rimrock watched it and wondered, then he simply watched it; and at last he began to spend.

His first big blow-out was a raid on The Mint, where Ike Bray still ran his games; and when Rimrock rose up from the faro table he owned the place, fixtures and all. It had been quite a brush, but Rimrock was lucky; and he had a check-book this time, for more luck. That turned the scales, for he outheld the bank; and, when he had won The Mint, he presented it to Old Hassayamp Hicks.

"They can talk all they please," he said in his presentation speech which, though brief, invoked tremendous applause, "but the man don't live that can say I don't remember my friends."

Yet how difficult it is to retain all our friends, though we come with gifts in both hands! Rimrock rewarded Hassayamp and L. W., and Woo Chong, and every man who had done him a kind act. If money can cement friendships he had won over the whole town, but with Mary Fortune he had failed. On that first triumphant night when, after their bout with Stoddard, they realized the true value of their mine; in the dim light of the balcony and speaking secretly into her ear, he had won, for one instant, a kiss. But it was a kiss of ecstasy, of joy at their triumph and the thought that she had saved him from defeat; and when he laid hold of her and demanded another she had fought back and leapt up and fled. And after that, repentance; the same, joyless waiting; and, at last, drink again, to forget. And then humbler repentance and forgiveness of a kind, but the sweet trustfulness was lost from her smile.

So with money and friends there came little happiness, either for Rimrock or yet for her. They looked at each other across a chasm of differences where any chance word might offend. He had alluded at one time to the fact that she was deaf and she had avoided his presence for days. And she had a way, when his breath smelled of drink, of drawing her head away. Once when he spoke to her in his loud, outdoor voice she turned away and burst into tears; but she would never explain what it was that had hurt her, more than to ask him not to do it again. So it went until his wild

ungoverned nature broke all bounds and he turned to drink.

Yet if the first phase of his devotion had been passed by Rimrock he was not lacking in attentions of a kind, and so one evening as the West-bound train was due Mary found herself waiting for him in the ladies' balcony. This oriental retreat, giving them a view of the lobby without exposing them to the rough talk of the men, was common ground for the women of the hotel, and as she looked over the railing Mary was distinctly conscious of the chic Mrs. Jepson, sitting near. Mrs. Jepson, as the wife of the Tecolote Superintendent, was in a social class by herself and, even after Mary's startling rise to a directorship in the Company, Mrs. Jepson still thought of her as a typist. Still a certain feeling of loyalty to her husband, and a natural fear for his job, had prompted Mrs. Jepson, in so far as possible, to overlook this mere accident of occupation. And behind her too-sweet smile there was another motive—her woman's curiosity was piqued. Not only did this deaf girl, this ordinary typist, hold the fate of her husband in her hand, but she could, if she wished, marry Rimrock Jones himself and become the wife of a millionaire. And yet she did not do it. This was out of the ordinary, even in Mrs. Jepson's stratum of society, and so she watched her, discreetly.

The train 'bus dashed up outside the door and the usual crowd of people came in. There was a whiff

of cold air, for the winter night was keen, and then a strange woman appeared. She walked in with a presence, escorted by Jepson, who was returning from a flying trip East; and immediately every eye, including Mrs. Jepson's, was shifted and riveted upon her. She was a tall, slender woman in a black picture-hat and from the slope of her slim shoulders to the high heels of her slippers she was wrapped in a single tiger skin. Not a Bengal tiger with black and tawny stripes, but a Mexican tiger cat, all leopard spots and red, with gorgeous rosettes in five parallel rows that merged in the pure white of the breast. It was a regal robe, fit to clothe a queen, and as she came in, laughing, she displayed the swift, undulating stride of the great beast which had worn that fine skin.

They came down to the desk and the men who had preceded them gave way to let her pass. She registered her name, meanwhile making some gay answer to a jesting remark from Jepson who laid aside his dignity to laugh. The clerk joined the merriment, whereupon it was instantly assumed that the lady was quite correct. But women, so they say, are preternaturally quick to recognize an enemy of the home. As Mary gazed down she became suddenly conscious of a sharp rapping on the balcony rail and, looking up, she beheld Mrs. Jepson leaning over, glaring at her husband. Perhaps Jepson looked up—he sensed her in some way—and, remembering, glanced wildly about. And then, to the moment, in came

Rimrock Jones, striding along with his big hat in his hand.

It happened as in a play, the swift entrance of the hero, a swifter glance, and the woman smiled. At sight of that tiger-skin coat Rimrock stopped dead in his tracks—and Jepson saw his chance to escape.

"Mr. Jones," he beckoned frantically, "let me introduce you to Mrs. Hardesty. Excuse me!" And he slipped away. There were explanations later, in the privacy of the Jepson apartments, but Mr. Jepson never could quite understand. Mrs. Hardesty had come out with a card from Mr. Stoddard and it was his duty, no less, to look after her. But meanwhile the drama moved swiftly, with Mary in the balcony looking on. She could not hear, but her eyes told her everything and soon she, too, slipped away. Her appointment was neglected, her existence forgotten. She had come—the other woman!

"Ah, well, well!" the woman cried as she opened her eyes at Rimrock and held out a jeweled hand, "have you forgotten me already? I used to see you so often—at the Waldorf, but you won't remember!"

"Oh! Back in New York!" exclaimed Rimrock heartily. "What'd you say the name? Oh, *Hardesty!* Oh, yes! You were a friend of——"

"Mr. Buckbee! Oh, I was sure you would remember me! I've come out to look at your mine!"

They shook hands at that and the crowd moved off further, though it increased as the circle ex-

panded, and then Rimrock looked again at the tiger-skin.

"Say, by George!" he exclaimed with unctuous admiration, "ain't that the finest tiger-skin you ever saw. And that's no circus product—that's a genuine *tigre*, the kind they have in Old Mexico!"

"Oh, you have been in Mexico? Then that's how you knew it! I meet so many people who don't know. Yes, I have an interest in the famous Tigre Mine and this was given me by a gentleman there!"

"Well, he must have been crazy over you!" declared Rimrock frankly, "or he'd never have parted with that skin!"

"Ah, you flatter me!" she said and turned to the clerk with an inquiry regarding her room.

"Give her the best there is!" spoke up Rimrock with authority, "and charge it up to the Company. No, now never you mind! Ain't you a friend of Buckbee's? And didn't you come out to see our mine?"

"Oh, thank you very much," answered Mrs. Hardesty sweetly, "I prefer to pay, if you don't mind."

"Your privilege," conceded Rimrock, "this is a fine, large, free country. We try to give 'em all what they want."

"Yes, it is!" she exclaimed. "Isn't the coloring wonderful! And have you spent all your life on these plains? Can't we sit down here somewhere? I'm just dying to talk with you. And I have business to talk over, too."

"Oh, not here!" exclaimed Rimrock as she glanced about the lobby. "This may not be the Waldorf, but we've got some class all the same. Come up to the balcony—built especially for the ladies—say, how's friend Buckbee and the rest?"

And then with the greatest gallantry in the world he escorted her to Mary's own balcony. There was another, across the well, but he did not even think of it. He had forgotten that Mary was in the world. As they sat in the dim alcove he found himself telling long stories and listening to the gossip of New York. Every word that he said was received with soft laughter, or rapt silence or a ready jest; and when she in her turn took the conversation in hand he found her sharing with him a new and unseen world. It was a woman's world, full of odd surprises. Everything she did seemed quite sweet and reasonable and at the same time daring and bizarre. She looked at things differently, with a sort of worldly-wise tolerance and an ever-changing, provocative smile. Nothing seemed to shock her even when, to try her, he moved closer; and yet she could understand.

It was a revelation to Rimrock, the laughing way she restrained him; and yet it baffled him, too. They sat there quite late, each delving into the mystery of the other's personality and mind, and as the lower lights were switched off and the alcove grew dimmer, the talk became increasingly intimate. A vein of poetry, of unsuspected romance, developed in Rimrock's mind

and, far from discouraging it or seeming to belittle it, Mrs. Hardesty responded in kind. It was a rare experience in people so different, this exchange of innermost thoughts, and as their voices grew lower and all the world seemed far away, they took no notice of a ghost.

It was a woman's form, drifting past in the dark corridor where the carpet was so thick and soft. It paused and passed on and there was a glint of metal, as of a band of steel over the head. Except for that it might have been any woman, or any uneasy ghost. For night is the time the dead past comes back and the soul mourns over what is lost—but at dawn the spirits vanish and the work of the world goes on.

Mary Fortune appeared late at the Company office, for she had very little to do; and even when there she sat tense and silent. Why not? There was nothing to do. Jepson ran the mine and everything about it, and Rimrock attended to the rest. All she had to do was to keep track of the records and act as secretary to the Board of Directors. They never met now, except perfunctorily, to give Rimrock more money to spend. He came in as she sat there, dashing past her for some papers, and was dashing out when she spoke his name.

"Oh, Mr. Jones," she said and, dimly noting its formality, he paused and questioned her greeting.

"Oh, it's Mister again, is it?" he observed stopping reluctantly. "Well, what's the matter now?"

"Yes, it's Mister," she said, managing to smile quite naturally. "You know you told me your name was 'Mister'—since you made your pile and all that—but, Mister, I'm going away."

"Going away!" exclaimed Rimrock, suddenly turning to look at her; and then he came hurriedly back.

"Say, what's the matter?" he asked uneasily, "have I done something else that is wrong?"

"Why, no," she laughed, "what a conscience you have! I'm going East for an operation—I should have gone long ago. Oh, yes, I've been thinking about it for quite a while; but now I'm going to go. You don't know how I dread it. It's very painful, and if it doesn't make me any better it's likely to make me—."

"Oh," said Rimrock thoughtfully, rubbing his chin, "well, say, when do you want to go? I'm going East myself and there ought to be one of us——"

"So soon?" enquired Mary and as Rimrock looked at her he caught a twinkle in her eyes. Not of merriment exactly, but of swift understanding and a hidden, cynical scorn.

"What d'ye mean?" he blustered. "Ain't I got a right——"

"Why, certainly," she returned, still with that subtle resentment, "I have no objections at all. Only it might make a difference to Mr. Stoddard if he found us both away."

"Aw, that's all bosh!" broke out Rimrock impatiently, "he's got his hands more than full in New

York. I happen to know he's framing up a copper deal that will lay the Hackmeisters wide open. That's why I want to go back. Mrs. Hardesty says——"

"Mrs. Hardesty?"

Rimrock stopped and looked down. Then he picked up his hat and made another false start for the door.

"Yes, Mrs. Hardesty—she came in last night. That lady that wore the tiger skin."

"Oh!" said Mary and something in her voice seemed to stab him in the back as he fled.

"Say, what do you mean?" he demanded, coming angrily back, "you speak like something was wrong. Can't a man look twice at some other woman without your saying: 'Oh!' I want you to understand that this Mrs. Hardesty is just as good as you are. And what's more, by grab, she's got stock in our Company and we ought to be treating her nice. Yes, she bought it from Stoddard; and if I could just pull her over——"

"How much stock?" asked Mary, reaching suddenly for a book, and Rimrock fidgeted and turned red.

"Two thousand shares!" he said defiantly. "She's got as much as you have."

"Oh!" murmured Mary as she ran through the book, and Rimrock flew into a fury.

"Now for the love of Mike!" he cried, striding towards her, "don't always be pulling that book! I know you know where every share is, and just who trans-

ferred it to who, but this Mrs. Hardesty has told me she's got it and that ought to be enough!"

"Why, certainly!" agreed Mary, instantly closing the book. "I just didn't recall the name. Is she waiting for you now? Then don't let me detain you. I'll be starting East to-night."

Rimrock rocked on his feet in impotent anger as he groped for a fitting retort.

"Well, go then!" he said. "What do I give a damn?" And he rushed savagely out of the room.

CHAPTER XVII

An Afterthought

IT was part of the violent nature of Rimrock that his wrath fell upon both the just and the unjust. Mary Fortune had worsted him in their passage at arms and left him bruised from head to heels. She had simply let him come on and at every bludgeon stroke she had replied with a rapier thrust. Without saying a word against the character of Mrs. Hardesty she had conveyed the thought that she was an adventuress; or, if not exactly that, then something less than a lady. And the sure way in which she had reached for that book was proof positive that the stock was not recorded. But the thing that maddened him most, and against which there was no known defense, was her subtle implication that Mrs. Hardesty was at the bottom of his plan to go East. And so, with the fury still hot in his brain, he made poor company on the road to the Tecolote.

Since Mrs. Hardesty had come, as a stockholder of course, to look over the Company's properties, it was necessary that she should visit the mine, though she was far from keen for the trip. She came down at

last, heavily veiled from the sunshine, and Rimrock helped her into his machine; but, being for the moment in a critical mood and at war in his heart against all women, he looked at her with different eyes. For the best complexion that was ever laid on will not stand the test of the desert and in the glare of white light she seemed suddenly older and pitifully made up and painted. Even the flash of pearly teeth and the dangerous play of her eyes could not hide the dark shadows beneath; and her conversation, on the morning after, seemed slightly artificial and forced.

Perhaps, in that first flight of their unleashed souls when they sat close in the balcony alone, they had reached a height that could never be attained when the sun was strong in their eyes. They crouched behind the windshield, for Rimrock drove recklessly, and went roaring out across the desert and between the rush of the wind and the sharp kick of the chuck-holes conversation was out of the question. Then they came to the camp, with its long rows of deal houses and the rough bulk of the concentrator and mill; and even this, to Mrs. Hardesty's wind-blown eyes, must have seemed exceedingly Western and raw.

A mine, at the best, is but a hole in the ground; and that which appears on top—the shaft-houses and stacks and trestles and dumps—is singularly barren of interest. The Tecolote was better than most, for there were open cuts with steam shovels scooping up the ore, and miners driving holes into the shattered forma-

tion and powder-men loading shots. Rimrock showed it all faithfully, and they watched some blasts and took a ride in the gliding cars, but it was hardly a trip that the average lady would travel from New York to take. So they both breathed a sigh when the ordeal was over and the car had taken them home.

At the door of the hotel Mrs. Hardesty disappeared, which gave Rimrock a chance for a drink, but as he went past the desk the clerk called him back and added to the burden of his day.

"What's these?" demanded Rimrock as the clerk handed over some keys, but he knew them all too well.

"The keys to the office, sir. Miss Fortune left quite suddenly and requested me to deliver them to you."

"Where'd she go?" he asked, and, not getting an answer, he burst into a fit of cursing. He could see it all now. She had not gone for an operation, she had gone because she was mad. She was jealous, and that was her way of showing it—she had gone off and left him in a hole. He ought to have known from that look in her eye and the polite, smiling way she talked. Now he was tied to the mast and if he went to New York he would have to turn over the mine to Jepson! And that would give Jepson just the chance he wanted to jump the Old Juan claim.

For a man who was worth fifty million dollars and could claim a whole town for his friends Rimrock put in a most miserable night as he dwelt on this blow to his hopes. He was like a man checkmated at chess

—every way he turned he was sure to lose if he moved. For the chance of winning a hypothetical two thousand shares, which Stoddard was supposed to have sold to Mrs. Hardesty, he had thrown away and lost forever his control over Mary Fortune's stock. Now, if he followed after her and tried to make his peace, he might lose his chance with Mrs. Hardesty as well; and if he stayed with *her* Mary was fully capable of throwing her vote with Stoddard's. It was more than her stock, it was her director's vote that he needed above everything else!

Rimrock paced up and down in his untidy room and struggled to find a way out. With Mary gone he could not even vote a dividend unless he came to an agreement with Stoddard. He could not get the money to carry out his plans, not even when it lay in bank. He could not appoint a new secretary, to carry on the work while he made his trip to New York. He couldn't do anything but stay right there and wait until he heard from her!

It was a humiliating position for a man to find himself in, and especially after his talk with Mrs. Hardesty. Perhaps he had not considered the ways and means very carefully, but he had promised her to go back to New York. A man like him, with his genius for finance and his masterful control of men, a man who could rise in a single year from a prospector to a copper king; such a man was wasted in provincial Arizona—his place was in Wall Street, New York. So

she had said that night when they sat close together and their souls sought the high empyrean of dreams—and now he was balked by a woman. Master of men he was, and king of finance he might be, but woman was still his bane.

He looked at it again by the cold light of day and that night he appealed to Mrs. Hardesty. She was a woman herself, and wise in the ways of jealousy, intrigue and love. A single word from her and this impenetrable mystery might be cleared up like mist before the sun. And she ought to help him because it was through her, indirectly, that all this trouble had occurred. Until her arrival there had never been a moment when he had seriously worried over Mary. She had scolded, of course, about his gambling and drinking and they had had their bad half hours, off and on; but never for an instant had there been the suggestion of a break in their business affairs. About that, at least, she had always been reasonable; but now she was capable of anything. It would not surprise him to get a telegram from Stoddard that he was coming out to take over the control; nor to discover later, across the directors' table, Mary Fortune sitting grimly by. He knew her too well! If she once got started! But he passed—it was up to Mrs. Hardesty.

They met at dinner, the lady being indisposed during the day as a result of their strenuous trip, but she came down now, floating gracefully in soft draperies and

Rimrock knew why he had built those broad stairs. He had thought, in jail, that he was building them for Mary, but they were for Mrs. Hardesty after all. She was a queen no less in her filmy gown than in the tiger-skin cloak that she wore, and Rimrock dared to use the same compliment on her that he had coined for Mary Fortune. They dined together in a secluded corner on the best that the chef could produce—and for a Chinaman, he accomplished miracles—but Rimrock said nothing of his troubles. The talk was wholly of gay, distant New York, and of the conflict that was forming there.

For a woman of society, compelled by her widowhood to manage her own affairs, it was wonderful to Rimrock how much she knew of the intricacies of the stock market and of the Exchange. There was not a financier or a broker of note that she did not know by name, and the complex ways by which they achieved their ends were an open book to her. Even Whitney H. Stoddard was known to her personally—the shrewdest intriguer of them all—and yet he, so she said, had a human side to him and let her in on occasional deals. He had been a close friend of her husband, in their boyhood, and that probably accounted for the fact; otherwise he would never have sold her that Tecolote.

"But he's got a string on it," suggested Rimrock shrewdly; but she only drooped her eyelashes and smiled.

"I never carry gossip between rivals," she said. "They might fly at each other's throats. You don't like Mr. Stoddard. Very well, he doesn't like you. He thinks you're flighty and extravagant. But is that any reason why we shouldn't be friends—or why my stock isn't perfectly good?"

"Don't you think it!" answered Rimrock. "Any time you want to sell it——"

"A-ah! At it again!" she chided laughingly. "How like fighting animals men are. If I'd toss that stock, like a bit of raw meat, in the midst of you copper-mad men! But I won't, never fear. In the fight that would follow I might lose some highly valued friend."

From the droop of her lashes Rimrock was left to guess who that friend might be and, not being quick at woman logic, he smiled and thought of Stoddard. They sat late at their table and, to keep him at ease, Mrs. Hardesty joined him in a cigarette. It was a habit she had learned when Mr. Hardesty was living; although now, of course, every one smoked. Then, back at last in the shadowy alcove—which was suddenly vacated by the Jepsons—they settled down on the Turkish divan and invited their souls with smoke. It rose up lazily as the talk drifted on and then Rimrock jumped abruptly to his problem.

"Mrs. Hardesty," he said, "I'm in a terrible fix and I want you to help me out. I never saw the man yet that I couldn't get away with—give me time, and room

according to my strength—but I've had a girl working for me, she's the secretary of our company, and she fools me every time."

Mrs. Hardesty laughed—it was soft, woman's laughter as if she enjoyed this joke on mere man—and even when Rimrock explained the dangerous side of his predicament she refused to take it seriously.

"Ah, you're all alike," she said sighing comfortably, "I've never known it to fail. It's always the woman who trusts through everything, and the man who disbelieves. I saw her, just a moment, as she passed down the hall and I don't think you have anything to fear. She's a quiet little thing——"

"Don't you think it!" burst out Rimrock. "You don't know her the way I do. She's an Injun, once she makes up her mind."

"Well, even so," went on Mrs. Hardesty placidly, "what reason have you to think she means trouble? Did you have any words with her before she went away? What reason did she give when she left?"

"Well," began Rimrock, "the reason she gave was some operation to be performed on her ears. But I know just as sure as I'm sitting here to-night she did it out of jealousy, over you."

"Over me!" repeated Mrs. Hardesty sitting up abruptly; and then she sank back and shook with laughter. "Why, you foolish boy," she cried, straight-

ening up reproachfully, "why didn't you tell me you were in love? And we sat here for hours! Did she see us, do you suppose? She must have! Was she waiting to speak to you, do you think?"

"My—God!" exclaimed Rimrock, rising slowly to his feet. "I had an appointment with her—that night!" He paused and Mrs. Hardesty sat silent, the laughter dead on her lips. "Yes, sir," he went on, "I was going to meet her—here! By grab, I forgot all about it!" He struck his leg a resounding whack and sank back upon the divan. "Well, now isn't—that fierce!" he muttered and Mrs. Hardesty tittered nervously.

"Ah, well," she said, "it's soon discovered, the reason why she left you so abruptly. But didn't she say a word about it? That doesn't seem very lover-like, to me. What makes you think the child was jealous? Did she mention my name at all?"

"Nope," mumbled Rimrock, "she never mentioned it. That girl is an Injun, all through! And she'll knife me, after this! I can feel it coming. But, by George, I plumb forgot!"

"Oh, come now!" consoled Mrs. Hardesty, giving him a gentle pat, "this isn't so bad, after all. If I can only see her, I'll explain it myself. Have you any idea where she's gone?"

"Bought a ticket for New York—where Old Stoddard hangs out. I can see my finish—right now!"

"No, but listen, Mr. Jones—or may I call you Rim-

rock? That's such a fine, Western name! Did it ever occur to you that the trains are still running? You could follow, and let me explain!"

"Aw, explain to a tiger cat! Explain to an Apache! I tell you that girl is an Injun. She'll go with you so far, and stand for quite a little; but when she strikes fire, look out!"

"Oh, very well," murmured Mrs. Hardesty and reached for a cigarette which she puffed delicately while Rimrock gloomed. It was painfully clear now—the cause of Mary's going and the embittered vindictiveness of her smile. Not only had he sat up to talk with Mrs. Hardesty, but he had brought her to where Mary had been waiting. He had actually talked love, without really meaning it, with this fascinating woman of the world; and, having an appointment to meet him right there, how could Mary help but know? He pictured her for a moment, lingering silently in the background, looking on where she could not hear. Was it less than human that she should resent it and make an excuse to go? And yet she had done it so quietly—that was the lady in her—without a word of tragedy or reproach! He remembered suddenly that she had laughed quite naturally and made some joke about his name being Mister.

"What's that you say about the trains still running?" he demanded as he roused up from his thoughts. "Well, excuse me, right now! I'm on my way! I'm going back to hunt that girl up!"

He leaped to his feet and left her still smoking as he rushed off to enquire about the trains.

"Well, well," she murmured as she gazed thoughtfully after him, "he's as impulsive as any child. Just a great, big boy—I rather like him—but he won't last long, in New York."

CHAPTER XVIII

New York

RIMROCK JONES' return to New York was as dramatic and spectacular as his first visit had been pretentious and prodigal. With two thousand dollars and a big black hat he had passed for a Western millionaire; now, still wearing the hat but loaded down with real money, he returned and was hailed as a Crœsus. There are always some people in public life whose least act is heralded to the world; whereas others, much more distinguished but less given to publicity, accomplish miracles and are hardly known. And then there are still others who, fed up with flattery and featured in a hundred ways, are all unwittingly the victims of a publicity bureau whose aim is their ultimate undoing.

A real Western cowboy with a pistol under his coat, a prospector turned multi-millionaire in a year, such a man—especially if he wears a sombrero and gives five-dollar tips to the bell-hops—is sure to break into the prints. But it was a strange coincidence, when Rimrock jumped out of his taxicab and headed for the Waldorf entrance, to find a battery of camera men all lined up to snap him and a squad of reporters in-

side. No sooner had Rimrock been shot through the storm door into the gorgeous splendors of Peacock Alley than they assailed him en masse—much as the bell-boys had just done to gain his grip and the five-dollar tip.

That went down first—the five-dollar tip—and his Western remarks on the climate. Then his naïve hospitality in inviting them all to the bar where they could talk the matter over at their ease, and his equally cordial agreement to make it tea when he was reminded that some reporters were women—it all went down and came out the same evening, at which Rimrock Jones was dazed. If he had telegraphed ahead, or let anyone know that he planned to return to New York, it would not have been surprising to find the reporters waiting, for he was, of course, a great man; but this was a quick trip, made on the spur of the moment, and he hadn't told a soul. Yet in circumstances like these, with a roomful of newspapers and your name played up big on the front page, it is hardly human nature to enquire too closely or wonder what is going on. Still, there was something up, for even coincidence can explain things only so far. Leaving out the fact that Mrs. Hardesty might have sent on the telegram herself, and that Whitney H. Stoddard might have motives of his own in inviting his newspapers to act; it did not stand to reason that the first man Rimrock ran into should have had such a sweet inside tip. Yet that was what the gay Buckbee told him—and circum-

stances proved he was right. The money that Rimrock put up that night, after talking it over in the café, that money was doubled within the next three days, and the stock still continued to advance. It was invested on a margin in Navajoa Copper, a minor holding of the great Hackmeister combine that Stoddard had set out to break.

Stoddard was selling short, so Buckbee explained, throwing great blocks of stock on a market that refused to break; and when the rush came and Navajoa started up Rimrock was there with the rest of his roll. It was a game that he took to—any form of gambling—and besides, he was bucking Stoddard! And then, there was Buckbee. He knew more in a minute than some brokers know in a lifetime; and he had promised to keep him advised. Of course it was a gamble, a man might lose, but it beat any game Rimrock had played. And copper was going up. Copper, the metal that stood behind it all, and that men could not do without.

There was a movement on such as Rimrock had never dreamed of, to control the copper product of the world. It had been tried before and had ended disastrously, but that did not prove it impossible. There were in the United States six or eight companies that produced the bulk of the ore. Two or three, like the Tecolote, were closed corporations, where the stock was held by a few; but the rest were on the market, the football of The Street, their stock owned by any-

body and everybody. It was for these loose stocks that the combine and Stoddard were fighting, with thousands of the public buying in, and as the price of some stock was jigged up and down it was the public that cast the die.

If the people were convinced that a certain stock was good and refused to be shaken down, the price of that stock went up. But if the people, through what they had read, decided that the stock was bad; then there was a panic that nothing could stop and the big interests snapped up the spoils. So much Rimrock learned from Buckbee, and Mrs. Hardesty told him the rest. It was her judgment, really, that he came to rely upon; though Buckbee was right, in the main. He told the facts, but she went behind them and showed who was pulling the strings.

It was from her that he had learned of the mighty press agencies—which at the moment were making much of his coup—and how shrewd financiers like the Hackmeisters or Stoddard used them constantly to influence the market. If it became known, for instance, that Rimrock Jones was plunging on Navajoa and that within three days he had doubled his money and was still holding out for a rise; that was big news for Hackmeister and his papers made the most of it. But if Navajoa went down and some broker's clerk lost his holdings and committed embezzlement, or if a mining engineer made an adverse report, or the company passed a dividend, then Stoddard's press agents would

make the most of each item—if he wished the stock to go down. Otherwise it would not be mentioned. It was by following out such subtleties and closely studying the tape, that brokers like Buckbee guessed out each move in advance and were able to earn their commissions.

But all this information did not come to Rimrock for nothing—there was a price which had to be paid. For reasons of her own the dashing Mrs. Hardesty appeared frequently in the Waldorf lobby, and when Rimrock came in with any of his friends he was expected to introduce them. And Rimrock's friends in that swarming hotel were as numerous as they were in Gunsight. He expected no less, wherever he went, than the friendship of every man; and if any held back, for any reason, he marked him as quickly for an enemy. He was as open-hearted and free in those marble corridors and in the velvet-hung club and café as the old Rimrock had been on the streets of Gunsight when he spoke to every Mexican.

It was his day of triumph, this return to the Waldorf where before he had been but a pretender, and it did his heart good to share his victory with the one woman who could understand. She knew all his ways now, his swift impulsive hatreds and his equally impulsive affections; and she knew, as a woman, just when to oppose him and when to lead him on. She knew him, one might say, almost too well for her success; for Rimrock was swayed more by his heart than his head,

and at times she seemed a little cold. There was a hard, worldly look that came over her at times, a sly, calculating look that chilled him when he might have told everything he knew. Yet it may easily be that he told her enough, and more than she needed to know.

In some curious way that Rimrock could never fathom, Mrs. Hardesty was interested in stocks. She never explained it, but her visits to the Waldorf had something to do with trades. Whether she bought or sold, gathered tips or purveyed them or simply guarded her own investments was a mystery that he never solved; but she knew many people and, in some way not specified, she profited by their acquaintance. She was an elusive woman, like another that he knew; but at times she startled him, too. Those times were mostly on the rare occasions when she invited him to supper at her rooms. These were at the St. Cyngia, not far from the Waldorf, a full suite with two servants to attend.

On his first formal call Rimrock had been taken aback by the wealth and luxury displayed. There were rare French tapestries and soft Persian rugs that seemed to merge into the furniture of the rooms and at his very first dinner she had poured out the wine until even his strong head began to swim. It was a new world to him and a new kind of woman—with the intellect and, yes, the moral standards of a man. She was dainty and feminine, and with a dark type of beauty that went to his head worse than wine, but with

it all she had a stockbroker's information and smoked and drank like a man. But then, as she said, all the women smoked now; and as far as he could judge, it was so. The women they saw in the gay all-night restaurants or after the theater in cabarets, all beautifully gowned and apparently with their husbands, drank and smoked the same as the men.

But the thing that startled Rimrock and made him uneasy was the way she had when they were alone. After the dinner was over, in her luxurious apartments, when the servant had left them alone, as they sat together across the table and smoked the scented cigarettes that she loved, he could feel a spell, a sort of enchantment, in every soft sweep of her eyes. At other times her long, slender arms seemed thin, in a way, and unrounded; but then her whole form took on the slim grace of a dancer and that strange light came into her eyes. It too was a light such as comes to dancers' eyes, as they take on some languid pose; but it had this difference—it was addressed to him, and her words belied her eyes. The eyes spoke of love, but, leaning across the table, the tiger lady talked of stocks.

It was on the occasion of his first winning on copper, when he had sold out his Navajoa at a big profit; and, after the celebration that he had provided, she had invited him to supper. The cigarettes were smoked and, with champagne still singing in his ears, Rimrock followed her to the dimly lighted reception-room. They sat by the fire, her slim arms gleaming and dark

shadows falling beneath her hair; and as Rimrock watched her, his heart in his throat, she glanced up from her musing to smile.

"What a child you are, after all!" she observed and Rimrock raised his head.

"Yes, sure," he said, "I'm a regular baby. It's a wonder someone hasn't noticed and took me in off the street."

"Yes, it is," she said with a twist of the lips, "the Street's no place for you. Some of those big bears will get you, sure. But here's what I was thinking. You came back to New York to watch Whitney Stoddard and be where you could do him the most harm. That's childish in itself because there's no reason in the world why both of you shouldn't be friends. But never mind that—men will fight, I suppose—it's only a question of weapons."

"Well, what do we care?" answered Rimrock with a ready smile, "I thought maybe you might adopt me."

"No, indeed," she replied, "you'd run away. I've seen boys like you before. But to think that you'd come back here to get the lifeblood of Stoddard and then go to buying Navajoa! Why not? Why, you might as well be a mosquito for all the harm you will do. A grown man like you—Rimrock Jones, the copper king—fighting Stoddard through Navajoa!"

"Well, why not?" defended Rimrock. "Didn't I put a crimp in him? Didn't I double my money on the deal?"

"Yes, but why Navajoa? Why not Tecolote? If you must fight, why not use a real club?"

Rimrock thought a while, for the spell was passing and his mind had switched from her charms.

"How'm I going to use Tecolote?" he blurted out at last. "It's tied up, until I can find that girl!"

"Not necessarily," she replied. "We who live by the Street learn to use our enemies as well as our friends. You will never whip Stoddard as long as you stand off and and refuse to sit in on the game. Isn't his vote as good as your friend, the typist's? Then use it to put Tecolote on the market. You know what I mean—to vote Tecolote commons and get the stakes on the board. Then while this scramble is on and he's fighting the Hackmeisters, buy Tecolote and get your control."

"Fine and dandy!" mocked Rimrock. "You're right, I'm a sucker; and it's a shame to take my money. But I don't want any Tecolote Commons."

"Why not?" she challenged, laughing gayly at his vehemence. "Are you afraid to play the game?"

"Not so you'd notice it," answered Rimrock grimly, "but I never play the other fellow's game. The Tecolote game is going to be played in Arizona, where my friends can see fair play. But look at Navajoa, how balled up that company is with its stocks all scattered around. Until it comes in for transfer nobody knows who's got it. They may be sold clear out and never know it. No, I may look easy, but I've been dog-bit

once and I've got the leg to show for it. To issue that stock we'd have to call in the lawyers and go through some reorganization scheme; and by the time we got through, with Miss Fortune gone, I'd find myself badly left. There'll be no lawyers for me, and no common stock. I know another way to win."

He paused and as she failed to ask what it was, he grunted and lit another cigarette.

"I wonder," she began after a thoughtful pause, "if Stoddard doesn't know where she is."

She had guessed it as surely as if he had stated his plan—he still hoped to find Mary Fortune. And then? Well, his plan was a little nebulous right there; but Mary held the necessary stock. If he could get control, in any way whatsoever, of that one per cent. of the stock he could laugh at Stoddard and take his dividends to carry on his fight in coppers. He had neglected her before, but this time it would be different; she could have anything she asked. And his detectives were hunting for her everywhere.

"Don't know," he answered after a dogged silence. "Why? what makes you think he does?"

She laughed.

"You don't know Mr. Stoddard as well as I do. He's a very successful man. Very thorough. If *he* set out to find Mary Fortune he'd be almost sure to do it."

"Hm," said Rimrock. "I'd better watch him, then. I'll call up about that to-morrow. Just have a man

there to watch the door—she might be going in or out."

"What a sleuth you are!" she answered gravely, and then she broke down and laughed. "Well, well," she said, "'tis a battle of wits, but love may find a way. Do you believe in love?" she went on abruptly as Rimrock showed signs of pique. "I just wanted to know. You great, big Western men seem more fitted, somehow, for the part of copper kings. But tell me honestly, I feel so trifling to-night, do you believe in the great love for one woman? Or do you hold with these drawing-room philosophers that man is by nature polygamous? Never mind my feelings—just tell me."

She coiled up lazily in her soft plush great-chair and regarded him with languid eyes, and Rimrock never suspected that the words he had spoken would go straight to Stoddard that night. He forgot his rejection of a get-together plan and his final refusal of common stocks; all he saw was this woman with her half-veiled glances and the firelight as it played on her arms. He had confessed his hope of still finding Mary and of winning her back to his side; but as he gazed at the tiger lady, sprawling so negligently before him, his fickle thoughts wandered to her. He denounced the theory of these latter-day philosophers that man is essentially a brute and, still watching her furtively, he expressed the conviction that he could love the One Woman forever.

CHAPTER XIX

Where All Men Meet

WHEN Rimrock had caught the first train for New York he had thought it was to seek out Mary Fortune—to kneel at her feet and tell her humbly that he knew he had done her a wrong—but as the months went by and his detectives reported no progress he forgot his early resolve. The rush and excitement of that great gambling game that goes on in the Stock Exchange, the plunges on copper and the rushes for cover, all the give-and-take of the great chase; it picked him up as a great flowing stream floats a leaf and hurries it along, and Gunsight and Tecolote and the girl he had known there seemed far away, like a dream.

He was learning the game from the gamblers about him, all the ins and outs of The Street; the names and methods of all the great leaders and how they had won their success; and also, bold gambler that he was, he was starting on a career of his own. In days gone by, at roulette or faro, or in frontier poker games, he had learned to play with big chances against him and, compared to them, Wall Street was safe. The money that he staked was less than six months' earnings of his

share of the Tecolote Mine; and from the brief notes of L. W., who was acting as his agent, there was more of it piling up. So he played it carelessly, like the plunger he was, and fortune—and Mrs. Hardesty—smiled.

He won, on the Street; and, though the stakes were not specified, he seemed to be winning with her. It was a question with him whether a woman of her kind ever thought of such a thing as marriage. She had money of her own, and all that money could buy; and her freedom, whatever that was. In this new world about him all the terms of life seemed changed and transposed and vague, and he never quite knew what she meant. Every word that she said when they discussed life and love seemed capable of a double intent, and whether by freedom she meant to yield or to escape something he had never made out. All he knew was that at times she seemed to beckon him on and at others to fend him away. She was fickle as fortune which, as he plunged and covered, sometimes smiled and again wore a frown.

But it was sparkling and stimulating as the champagne he now drank, this new life with its win and lose, and he played his stakes with the stoical repose of a savage, the delighted abandon of a boy. His broker was always Buckbee, that gay, laughing Beau Brummel who had given him his first start in the world. It was Buckbee who had met him when he first came to the Waldorf with his assays and his samples of ore and,

after much telephoning and importuning and haggling, had arranged for his interview with Stoddard. That interview had resulted in Rimrock's first clash with Stoddard, and he had hated him ever since; for a man who would demand a controlling interest in a mine for simply lending his name was certainly one who was fully capable of grabbing the rest if he could. So Rimrock had fought him; but for Buckbee, the broker, he had nothing but the best of good will.

To be sure Buckbee worked for Stoddard—that was plainly made evident at the time they had made the first deal—but he was open-hearted and honest and generous with his tips, and Rimrock found they were good. Buckbee even went further, he arranged credit for Rimrock at one of the biggest banks and when in his plunges he was caught short of funds the bank made him loans on his note. They took no chances, for he was rated at millions as half owner of the Tecolote Mine, but it helped out mightily as he extended his operations and found his margins threatened. But all this buying and selling of stocks, the establishment of his credit and the trying out of his strength, it was all preliminary to that great contest to come when he would come out into the open against Stoddard.

Whitney Stoddard was a man rated high up in the millions, but he was fallible like the rest. His wealth, compared to Rimrock's was as a hundred dollars to one, but it was spread out a hundred times as far; and with his next dividend, which was due in December,

Rimrock would have nearly a million in cash. To Stoddard, at the same time, there would come nearly the same amount of money, but it would be gone within a few days. There were obligations to be met, as Rimrock well knew, that would absorb his great profits and more. The Tecolote Mine, before it began to pay, had cost several million dollars in dead work. That money had been borrowed, and while Rimrock took in velvet, Stoddard was obligated to pay his debts.

Several months went by and, patient Indian that he was, Rimrock still followed on Stoddard's trail. He looked up his connections with the Transcontinental railroad and there he made his first strike. Although he moulded the policies of that great corporation and seemed endowed with unlimited power his actual holdings in the stock of the company were almost ridiculously small. Yet he took advantage of his dominating position and the influence it gave him with the directors to make such coups as he had made with the Tecolote, building the branch line which had given value to his mine. As a business proposition it was a good investment for the Company, but who was it that reaped the big profits? By the investment of less than three million dollars—which he had borrowed as he went along—Whitney Stoddard had acquired practically a half interest in a property which he valued at a hundred millions. And now he was bucking the Hackmeisters!

The thought of this man, who had come up from

nothing and was even yet barely on his feet, deliberately attempting to break the great copper combine was hardly credible to Rimrock. He marveled now at the presumption of Stoddard in offering him fifty millions for his half and the control of the mine. From what he could gather Stoddard had never possessed fifty millions, nor did he possess them then. He was trading on his name and traveling on a shoestring; quite the common thing in New York. But Rimrock knew as well as he knew anything that a man like Stoddard was dangerous. As sure as the time came, by some hook or crook, he would beat him out of his mine. The thing to do was to beat him to it—to raid his newly acquired Navajoa stocks and then pinch him until he let go of Tecolote. But it must be done secretly, not a word to anybody, not even to Buckbee or Mrs. Hardesty. They were friends of Stoddard's as well as his—it was safest to work alone.

So, while outwardly the same good-hearted plunger, Rimrock began his campaign of revenge. It opened with a series of secret orders to outside brokers that he knew and soon, by selling Navajoa short, he had hammered the asking price down. Then he bought it in, a little at a time, until the market began to rise; and then, vindictively, he slaughtered it again and gathered in more at the bottom. Not for nothing had he listened to Mrs. Hardesty and Buckbee and learned how the market riggers worked, but neither to her nor to Buckbee did he so much as hint of his purpose. His

day would come when the Tecolote dividend was voted, when he got his million dollar check; and the only thing that could keep him from a notable revenge was some slip-up in connection with the dividend.

In the continued absence of Mary Fortune, with her third and decisive vote, it would be necessary for Rimrock to agree with Stoddard, to the extent of dividing their profits. Not a great ways to go, even for men who were sworn enemies, and Stoddard certainly needed the money. He needed it badly, much worse than Rimrock, and would need it from time to time; yet until Rimrock actually got his hands on the money it was essential to conceal his plans. For a shrewd man like Stoddard, if he got an inkling of his purpose, was perfectly capable of tying up their profits and of stopping his credit at the bank. It was dangerous ground and Rimrock trod it warily, buying Navajoa in the most roundabout ways; yet month after month increased his holdings until his credit at the bank was stretched. If they asked for collateral he could turn over his Navajoa, although that would tip off his hand; but his note was still good and he went in deeper as the date of the annual meeting drew near.

There came a time when Buckbee asked shrewd questions and Mrs. Hardesty took him playfully to task; but he carried it off by wise nods and smiles and the statement that he knew something good. He was learning the game and, to cover up his tracks, he joined the mad whirl of social life. In place of his black

sombrero and the high-heeled boots that had given him his entree in New York he appeared one evening in a top hat and dress suit, with diamonds glittering down the front of his shirt. It was a new plunge for him, but Buckbee supplied the tailor and Mrs. Hardesty launched his début.

She had almost adopted him, this baffling, "free" woman, and yet she still had her reserves. She went with him everywhere, but the recherché suppers were almost a thing of the past. It was the opera now, and the gayest restaurants, and dinners where they met distinguished guests; but at the entrance of the St. Cyngia, when the graven-faced doorman opened the door to let her pass, she had acquired a way of giving Rimrock her hand without asking if he wouldn't come in. She played him warily, for his nature was impetuous and might easily lead him too far; but the time came at last when she found him recalcitrant and insurgent against her will.

It was at the opera where, amid jewelled women and men in immaculate attire, they had sat through a long and rather tedious evening during which Mrs. Hardesty had swept the boxes with her lorgnette. Something that she saw there had made her nervous and once in the cloakroom she delayed. Rimrock waited impatiently and when at last she joined him he forced his way aggressively into the slow-moving crowd and they were swept on down the broad, marble stairs. Once a part of that throng, there was no escaping its surge, and yet,

as they drifted with the rest, two great columns of humanity flowing together like twin brooks that join in a river below, she clutched his arm and started back; but the crowd swept her inexorably on. Then Rimrock caught her glance—it was flashing across the foyer to the stream on the other side. He followed it instinctively and there, tripping gracefully down the stairway as he had seen her once before at Gunsight, was Mary Fortune, his girl!

Yes, his girl! Rimrock knew it instantly, the girl he had always loved. The One Woman he could love forever if fate would but give him the chance. He started forward, but a hand restrained him; it was Mrs. Hardesty at his side.

"Where are you going?" she asked and the slim, jewelled fingers closed down on his hand like a vise.

"Let me go!" muttered Rimrock, as he struggled against her; but she jerked him back to her side.

"Don't you dare to humiliate me!" she hissed into his ear, "don't you dare to leave me—for her!"

"It's Mary!" mumbled Rimrock without taking his eyes from her and Mrs. Hardesty tightened her grasp.

"If you do—I'll kill you!" she added dangerously; but Rimrock gave no heed. He had forgotten all about her; forgotten she was there, the dead weight that was holding him back; all he saw was Mary, more radiant than ever, moving towards him down the stairs. She was dressed in soft white and her glorious brown hair, that had before been crushed down beneath its clasp,

was fluffed out now in all its beauty; and she talked and laughed as she came. At her side was an elderly, distinguished gentleman who listened with an indulgent smile—and then they were engulfed in the crowd. The mass of humanity that had swept them down the stairway closed in and swallowed them up.

She was gone—but she was there—right there through the crowd—and Rimrock started towards her. Mrs. Hardesty followed, dragged on by main strength, and then resolutely she set her feet. The outraged escorts of jostled ladies formed a solid phalanx against him and Rimrock wheeled impatiently.

"Let go of my arm!" he commanded savagely and then he met her eyes. If he had doubted before the nature of the tiger woman he could read it now at a glance. She was choking with anger and her thin, even teeth were bared as she hissed out her breath; and then she spoke, very quietly:

"If you are a gentleman," she said in his ear, "you will not fail to escort me home. Otherwise——"

She stopped, but the roll of her eyes conveyed a threat that went beyond words. She was a tigress, after all, a woman of dark passions and uncontrolled anger, a woman who beneath her languid grace had the strength and the courage to strike. And now as she faced him the mill-race of people surged against them and carried them on. They moved with the crowd, there was no escape, and she lashed him with bitter words. He listened, unchastened, his head held

high, his eyes still seeking for Mary; and as they plunged into the opposing currents of the street, he met her, face to face.

The distinguished man was talking now and Mary was listening to what he said; yet her eyes, that were accustomed to read from the lips, were now free to look about. A swift, unbidden gladness leapt up into them at first as she recognized Rimrock in the crowd; and then, quick as lightning, she saw the other woman and the glad look went out of her eyes. They flared up suddenly with the old anger and resentment and as quickly took on a distant stare. Then they turned to her escort and as Rimrock was shoved past them he heard her answer him pleasantly. It was just a word, only a fraction of a word, and then Mrs. Hardesty broke in. What she said fell again upon unheeding ears, but Rimrock knew it was harsh. Harsh and threatening and yet with an undertone of passion that thrilled him against his will.

He found himself in a gliding auto' with the street lights twinkling past, and there he came out of his dream.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked at last as he discovered her still walking on and she burst into hysterical tears.

"What's the matter!" she echoed, "why, can't you see? I'm in love with you—that's what's the matter! Oh, I hate that woman! She's a cruel thing—didn't you see the way she looked at me? But I'll pay her

back, I'll get even with her yet! Ah, my God, how I hate the sight of her!"

She fell to weeping and Rimrock, silenced, drew away and left her alone. Then the automobile stopped and through the glass they could see the imposing entrance of the St. Cyngia. The chauffeur reached back and threw open the door and Rimrock leapt quickly out, but Mrs. Hardesty did not follow. She sat in the half-darkness, composing her hair and working swiftly to cover the traces of tears; and when she stepped out she was calm.

"Excuse me," she whispered as he led her towards the door, "I didn't mean what I said. But I do love you, Rimrock, in spite of myself, and—won't you come in for a moment?"

They stood at the entrance and the Sphinxlike doorman opened the door to let them pass. Outside it was cold and from the portals there came forth a breath of warm air, but for the first time Rimrock held back.

"No, thank you very much," he said, bowing formally, and turned quickly back towards the car. She watched him a moment, then drew her cloak about her and hurried in swiftly through the door.

CHAPTER XX

A Letter from the Secretary

AS Mrs. Hardesty guessed, Rimrock was hurrying away in order to follow Mary Fortune; and as Rimrock guessed, she had invited him in to keep him from doing just that. She failed, for once, and it hurt her pride; but Rimrock failed as well. After a swift spin through the streets he returned to his hotel and called up his detective in a rage.

"Say, what kind of an agency are you running, anyhow?" he demanded when he got his man. "Ain't you been working ten months to find Mary Fortune? Well, I met her to-night, on the street. What's that you say? There's three million people! Well, I don't care if there's six—I want you to find that girl! No, stop her nothing! You lay a hand on her and I'll come down to your office and kill you. Just tell me where she is and keep an eye on her and I don't care what you charge. And paste this in your hat—if you don't find that girl you'll have to sue for your pay!"

The agency had to sue, for ten days later, Rimrock received a letter from her hand. It was mailed from Gunsight, Arizona, and was strictly business through-

out. It was, in fact, the legal thirty days' notice of the annual meeting of the Company

"in the town of Gunsight, county of Geronimo, Territory of Arizona, on Tuesday, the 22nd day of December, to transact the following business, viz:

"1—to elect a Board of Directors

"2—to transact any other business that may properly come before the meeting."

Rimrock read it over and his courage failed him—after all he was afraid to face her. He did not flatter himself that she hated him; she despised him, and on account of Mrs. Hardesty. How then could he hasten back to Gunsight and beg for a chance to explain? She had fled from his presence ten months before, on the day after Mrs. Hardesty came; and ten months later, when she met him by accident, he was with Mrs. Hardesty again. As far as he knew Mrs. Hardesty was a perfect lady. She went out everywhere and was received even by millionaires on terms of perfect equality—and yet Mary Fortune scorned her. She scorned her on sight, at a single glance, and would not even argue the matter. Rimrock decided to use "the enclosed proxy."

He made it out in the name of L. W. Lockhart and returned it by the following mail, and then he called up the detective agency and told them to go ahead and sue. He told them further that he was

willing to bet that Stoddard knew where she was all the time; and if they were still working for him, as he strongly suspected, they could tell him she was back in Gunsight. Rimrock hung up there and fell to pacing the floor and for the first time the busy city looked gray. It looked drab and dirty and he thought longingly of the desert with its miles and miles of clean sand. He thought of his mine and how he had fought for it, and of all his friends in the straggling town; of Old Juan and L. W. and hearty Old Hassayamp with his laugh and his Texas yupe. And of Mary Fortune, the typist, as he had known her at first—but now she was sending letters like this:

"DEAR SIR:

You are hereby notified that the regular Annual Meeting of the Stockholders of the Tecolote Mining Company will be held at the offices of the Company, in the Tecolote Hotel," etc., etc.

Rimrock threw down the letter and cursed himself heartily for a fool, a chump and a blackguard. With a girl like that, and standing all she had from him, to lose her over Mrs. Hardesty! Who was Mrs. Hardesty? And why had she gone to Gunsight and fetched him back to New York? Was it because he was crazy that he had the idea that she was an agent, somehow, of Stoddard? That two thousand shares of Tecolote stock that she had assured him Stoddard

had sold her, wasn't it part of their scheme to lure him away and break up his friendship with Mary? Because if Mrs. Hardesty had it she had never produced it, and there was no record of the transfer on the books. Rimrock brought down his fist and swore a great oath never to see the woman again. From the day he met her his troubles had begun—and now she claimed she loved him!

Rimrock curled his lip at the very thought of any New York woman in love. There was only one woman who knew what the word meant and she was in Gunsight, Arizona. He picked up her letter and scanned it again, but his eyes had not learned to look for love. Even the driest formula, sent from one to another, may spell out that magic word; may spell it unconsciously and against the will, if the heart but rules the hand. Mary Fortune had told him in that briefest of messages that she was back in Gunsight again; and furthermore, if he wished to see her, he could do so in thirty days. It told him, in fact, that while their personal relations had been terminated by his own unconsidered acts; as fellow stockholders, perhaps even as partners, they might meet and work together again. But Rimrock was dense, his keen eyes could not see it, nor his torn heart find the peace that he sought. Like a wounded animal he turned on his enemy and fought Stoddard to keep down the pain. And back at Gunsight, trying to forget her hate, Mary Fortune fought her battle alone.

There was great excitement—it amounted almost to a panic—when Mary Fortune stepped in on Jepson. During her unexplained absence he had naturally taken charge of things, with L. W. of course, to advise; and to facilitate business he had moved into the main office where he could work with the records at hand. Then, as months went by and neither she nor Rimrock came back to assert their authority, he had rearranged the offices and moved her records away. Behind the main office, with its plate-glass windows and imposing furniture and front, there were two smaller rooms; the Directors' meeting place and another, now filled with Mary's records. A clerk, who did not even know who she was, sat at his ease behind her fine desk; and back in the Directors' room, with its convenient table, L. W. and Jepson were in conference. She could see them plainly through the half-opened door, leaning back and smoking their cigars, and in that first brief interval before they caught sight of her she sensed that something was wrong.

Of course there were apologies, and Jepson insisted upon moving out or giving her any room she chose, but Mary assured him she had not come back permanently and the smaller room would do just as well. Then she set about writing the notices of the annual meeting, which had to be sent out by her hand, and Jepson recovered from his fright. Perhaps he recovered too much; for Mary Fortune had intuitions, and she remembered that first glimpse of L. W. As

the agent of Rimrock and his legal representative it was desirable, of course, to be friends; but Jepson, it was well known, was the agent of Stoddard and Stoddard was after their mine. Therefore it ill became Lockhart, with one treachery against him, to be found smoking so comfortably with Jepson.

So astonished and stunned had she been by the changes and the sudden suspicions that arose that Mary at first had stood startled and silent, and Jepson had raised his voice. At this he remembered that she had gone East for an operation to help restore her hearing and, seeing her now so unresponsive, he immediately assumed the worst. So he shouted his explanations and Mary, flushing, informed him that she could hear very well.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he apologized abjectly; but she noticed that he kept on shouting. And then in a flash of sudden resentment she bit her lips and let him shout. If he still wished to think that she was deaf as a post she would not correct him again. Perhaps if her suspicions should prove to be justified it would help her to discover his plans.

In her room that evening Mary brought from her trunk the ear-'phone she had cast aside. She had packed it away with a sigh of relief and yet a lingering fear for the future, and already she was putting it on. At the back of the transmitter there was a mechanical device which regulated the intensity of the sound. When she settled the clasp across her head

and hung the 'phone over her ear she set it at normal and then advanced the dial until she could hear the faintest noise. The roar of the lobby, drifting in through the transom, became separated into its various sounds. She could hear men talking and outbursts of laughter and the scrape of moving chairs. The murmur of conversation in the adjoining room became a spat between husband and wife and, ashamed of her eavesdropping, she put down the instrument and looked about, half afraid.

As the doctor through his stethoscope can hear the inrush of air as it is drawn into the patient's lungs, or the surge of blood as it is pumped through the heart with every telltale gurgle of the valves; so with that powerful instrument she could hear through walls and know what was being said. It was a wonderful advantage to have over these men if she discovered that there was treachery afoot and the following morning, to test it out, she wore her 'phone to the office.

"Mr. Jepson," she said as he rose nervously to meet her, "I'd like to bring my books down to date. Of course it is mostly a matter of form, or I couldn't have been gone for so long, but I want to look over the records of the office and make out my annual report."

"Why, certainly," responded Jepson, still speaking very clearly, and assuming his most placating smile, "I'd be glad to have you check up. With Mr. Jones away I've been so pressed by work I hardly know where we are. Just make yourself at home and any-

thing I can do for you, please feel free to let me know."

She thanked him politely and then, as she ran through the files, she absently removed her ear-'phone.

"Just hold out that report of the mining experts," she heard Jepson remark to his clerk; and in an instant her suspicions were confirmed. He had had experts at work, making a report on their property, but he wished to withhold it from her. That report was doubtless for Whitney H. Stoddard, the only man that Jepson really served, the man who actually controlled their mine. But she worked on unheeding and presently, from across the room, she heard him speak again. His voice was low, but the painful operations, the tedious treatments she had endured, had sharpened her hearing until she caught every word except the mumbled assent of the clerk.

"And tell Mr. Lockhart I'll arrange about that rebate. The check will go directly to him."

He went on then with some hurried directions about the different accounts to be changed and then, without troubling to shout at her again, he turned and slipped away. She had found him out, then, the very first day—Mr. Jepson had an understanding with L. W.! She retired to her room to think it over and then went systematically to work on the books, but these seemed scrupulously correct. The influence of Stoddard, that apostle of thoroughness, was apparent throughout the office; for Jepson well knew that the

day was coming when he must render an account to his master. The books were correct, yet she could hardly believe the marvellous production they recorded. Her share alone—a poor one per cent. of all that enormous profit—would keep her in comfort for the rest of her life; she need never work again.

But as the days went by and the yearly profit was reduced to dollars and cents; as she looked over the statement from L. W.'s bank and saw the money piling up to their credit; the first thrill of joy gave way to fear—of Stoddard, and what he might do. With interests so vast lying unprotected what could restrain his ruthless hand? And yet there was Rimrock, wrecking his life in New York and letting her watch their mine alone! A wave of resentment rose up at the thought—it was the old hatred that she tried to fight down—and she clasped her hands and gazed straight ahead as she beheld in a vision, the woman! A lank rag of a woman, a Kipling's vampire, who lived by the blood of strong men! And to think that she should have fastened on Rimrock, who was once so faithful and true!

For the thousandth time there rose up in her mind the old Rimrock as she had seen him first—a lean, sunburned man on a buckskin horse with a pistol slung at his hip; a desert miner, clean, laughing, eager, following on after his dream of riches. But now, soft and fat, in top hat and diamonds, swaggering past with that woman on his arm! It would be a

blessing for them both if Stoddard should jump the mine and put them back where they were before—he a hardy prospector; and she a poor typist, with a dream! But the dream was gone, destroyed forever, and all she could do was to fight on.

As she waited for his letter from day to day, Mary Fortune thought incessantly of Rimrock. She went out to the mine and gazed at the great workings where men appeared no larger than ants. She watched the ore being scooped up with steam shovels and dropped load by load into cars; she saw it crushed and pulverized and washed and the concentrates dumped into more cars; and then the endless chain of copper going out and the trainloads of supplies coming in. It was his, if he would come to it; every man would obey him; his orders would tear down a mountain; and yet he chose to grow fat and sordid, he preferred that woman to her!

She fought against it, but the anger still raged that had driven her fleeing from New York. How could she endure it, to meet him again? And yet she hoped he would come. She hated him, but still she waited and at last his letter came. She tore it open and drew out his proxy; and then in the quiet of her office she sat silent, while the letter lay trembling in her hands. This was his answer to her, who had endured so much for him, his answer to her invitation to come. He enclosed his proxy for L. W.

She began on a letter, full of passionate reproaches,

and tore it up in a rage. Then she wrote another, and tore it up, and burst into a storm of tears. She rose up at last and, dry-eyed and quiet, typed a note and sent it away. It was a formal receipt for his proxy for Lockhart and was signed: Mary R. Fortune, Secretary.

CHAPTER XXI

The Second Annual Meeting

THE second annual meeting of the Tecolote stockholders found Whitney H. Stoddard in the chair. Henry Rimrock Jones was too busy on the stock market to permit of his getting away. He was perfecting a plan where by throwing in all his money, and all he could borrow at the bank, he hoped to wrest from Stoddard his control of Navajoa, besides dealing a blow to his pride. But Whitney H. Stoddard, besides running a railroad and a few subsidiary companies as well, was not so busy; he had plenty of time to come to Gunsight and to lay out a carefully planned program. As his supposed friend, the mysterious Mrs. Hardesty, had remarked once upon a time: he was a very thorough man, and very successful.

He greeted Mary warmly and in a brief personal chat flattered her immensely by forgetting that she was deaf. He also found time to express his gratification that she had approved his idea of a temperance camp. In the election that followed the incumbent Directors were unanimously re-elected, whereupon,

having performed their sole function as stockholders, they adjourned and immediately reconvened as Directors. In marked contrast to the last, this meeting of the Directors was characterized by the utmost harmony —only L. W. seemed ill at ease. He had avoided Mary since the day she came back, and even yet seemed to evade her eye; but the reason for that appeared in time.

After the usual reports of the secretary and treasurer, showing a condition of prosperity that made even Stoddard's eyes gleam, Mr. Jepson presented his report. It was a bulky affair, full of technical statistics and elaborate estimates of cost; but there was a recommendation at the end.

"The report of our treasurer," said Jepson in closing, "shows a net profit of several million dollars, but I wish to point out our losses. Chief of these is the enormous wastage which comes from shipping our concentrates. There is no doubt in my mind that the Tecolote properties contain an inexhaustible supply of ore; nor that that ore, if economically handled, will pay an increasing profit. The principal charges, outside the operating expenses, have been freight and the smelting of our concentrates. As you doubtless know, the long haul to El Paso, and the smelter charges at that end, have materially reduced our net profits. The greater part of this loss is preventable and I therefore recommend that the Company construct its own smelter."

He went on with estimates of costs and the esti-

mated saving per ton, but Mary Fortune allowed her attention to stray. She was thinking of Rimrock Jones, and she was watching Rimrock's proxy. Like a criminal on trial L. W. sat glowering, his dead cigar still in his teeth; and before the end of the report was reached the sweat was beading his face.

"Well, I, for one," began Stoddard diplomatically, "most heartily approve of this plan. It will necessitate, of course, a postponement of profits, but I think we can all stand that. I therefore suggest that we apply this year's profits to the immediate construction of a smelter and, if I hear a motion, we will consider the question of passing the annual dividend."

He paused and as Mary went on with her writing a dead silence fell upon the room. L. W. glanced at Jepson and then at Stoddard and at last he cleared his throat.

"Well, Mr. President," he said, half-heartedly, "this is a new proposition to me. I regret very much that Mr. Jones isn't here, but—well, I make a motion that we build the smelter and pass the annual dividend."

He spoke with an effort, his eyes on the table, and at the end he sank back in his chair.

"Did you get that, Miss Fortune?" asked Stoddard solicitously and Mary nodded her head.

"Yes, I second the motion," she answered sweetly and an electric thrill passed round the room. It had not been expected by the most optimistic that the vote would be unanimous.

"All in favor, say 'Ay!' spoke up Stoddard sharply, but L. W. had sprung to his feet.

"Mr. President!" he began, suddenly panting with excitement, and Stoddard fixed him with his steely eyes.

"Very well, Mr. Lockhart," he responded curtly, "what is it you wish to say?"

"Why, I—I didn't know," began L. W. haltingly, "that she was going to vote—that way."

"Well, you know it now," answered Stoddard freezingly, "does that conclude your remarks?"

"Oh, no!" burst out L. W., his drawn face twitching. "I—in that case, I change my vote. I don't think Mr. Jones——"

"You haven't voted yet," corrected Stoddard shortly, "all in favor please say: 'Ay!'"

"Ay!" said Mary and as Stoddard echoed it he cast a sneering glance at L. W.

"Do I understand, Mr. Lockhart," he enquired pointedly, "that you wish to go on record as voting 'No'?"

"Yes, put me down 'No!'" directed L. W. feverishly. "I don't approve of this at all. Rimrock needs the money—he wrote me particularly—I wouldn't put him out for the world." He straightened the stoop from his long, bent back and his eyes opened up appealingly. "Put me down for a 'No,'" he repeated wildly. "My God, he'll kill me for this. I wouldn't cross that boy for anything in the world—he's the

best friend a man ever had. But put me down 'No'—you will, won't you, Miss? I don't want Rimrock to know."

"Mr. Lockhart votes 'No,'" broke in Stoddard peremptorily, "the 'Ayes' have it and the motion is carried. Is there any other business?"

His cold, incisive words seemed almost to stab, but L. W. still swayed on his feet.

"I'd like to explain," he went on brokenly. "I never go back on a friend. But Rimrock, he's wasting his money back there—I thought it would be a kindness."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Lockhart," interrupted Stoddard impatiently, "we all know the goodness of your heart. Do I hear a motion to adjourn?"

He shifted his keen, commanding eyes to Mary, who nodded her head in return. She was watching L. W. as he stood there sweating, with the anguish of that Judas-like thought. He had betrayed his friend, he had sold him for gold; and, already, he was sorry.

"Second the motion," said Stoddard. "All in favor say 'Ay!' The meeting stands adjourned."

He rose up quickly and gathering up his papers, abruptly left the room. Jepson followed as quickly and L. W., still talking, found himself alone with the girl. She was gazing at him strangely and as he paused enquiringly she went over and held out her hand.

"I understand, Mr. Lockhart," she said, smiling comfortingly. "I understand just how you feel. It *was*

a kindness—I felt so myself—and that's why I voted as I did."

The staring eyes of L. W. suddenly focused and then he seized her hand. "God bless you," he cried, crushing her fingers in his grip. "You'll make it right on the books? God bless you, then; I wouldn't sell out that boy for all the money in the world."

He broke off suddenly and dashed from the room while Mary gazed pensively after him. She too, in a way, had betrayed her friend; but she had not done it for gold.

As secretary of the Company and the Board of Directors it devolved upon Mary Fortune to notify Rimrock of the passed dividend. She knew as well as L. W. knew that it would be a bitter blow to him, but she felt no pity or regret. The money that would otherwise be wasted in New York would be diverted to the construction of the smelter, and if he found the loss a hardship he had only himself to thank. She went into her office and shut the door, but, simple as the letter seemed, she was unable to put it on paper. Three times she tried, but at each attempt her pent-up anger burst forth and the coldest and most business-like words she could summon seemed packed with hate and resentment. She gave up at last and was sitting listlessly when she heard voices in the outer room. It was Jepson and Stoddard, and as she listened closer she could make out what they said.

"I've got a report here," said the voice of Jepson, "that I'd like to show you—alone."

There was an impatient slamming of desk drawers and then the clerk spoke up—the young man who had taken Mary's place.

"That report of the experts? I put it in here. You remember, on account of Miss Fortune."

"Oh, yes," answered Jepson, "and by the way, where is she?"

And then suddenly his voice was dropped. Mary reached for her ear-'phone and slipped it on and listened to catch every word. If Jepson saw fit to practice deceit she had no compunction in listening in.

"Well, that's all right," he was saying, "she can't hear what we say. You go on out for your lunch."

There was a scuffling of feet and then, still talking, Jepson led the way to the Directors' room.

"Yes, she reads your lips—she's really quite clever at it—that's her, running the typewriter, now."

He shut the door and for several minutes Mary played a tattoo on her machine. Then she keyed down quietly and, setting her transmitter at its maximum, she turned it towards the wall.

"This is that report," the voice of Jepson was saying, "that you spoke to me about in the spring. It gives the geology of the whole Tecolote properties, by the very best experts in the field—three independent reports, made in advance of litigation, and each comes to the same conclusion. If we accept the ore-body

as a single low-grade deposit instead of a series of high-grade parallel veins—and each of these experts does—the crest of that dome, the Old Juan claim, is the apex of the whole. In other words, according to the apex law, the possession of the Old Juan claim will give us indisputable right to the whole property. You can look over that yourself."

There was a period of silence, broken only by the rattling of Mary Fortune's machine, and then they began again.

"Very well," said Stoddard, "this seems satisfactory. Now what about this L. W. Lockhart? In our meeting this morning he showed such a contemptible weakness that—now Jepson, that was very careless of you! Why didn't you find out before that fiasco how Miss Fortune intended to vote? It must have been perfectly evident to her, from the way Mr. Lockhart talked, that he had been—well, over-persuaded, to say the least. It was very awkward, and if I hadn't rushed it she might have reconsidered her vote. But never mind that—I suppose you did your best—now who is to re-locate this claim?"

"Well, that's the question," began Jepson. "There's a man here named Bray, who used to keep a saloon—"

"No, no!" broke in Stoddard, "no disreputable characters! Now, Jepson, this is up to you! You're the only man we can trust in an extremity——"

"Positively—no!" exclaimed Jepson firmly. "I absolutely refuse to touch it. I'll arrange the prelimi-

naries, but after it's started you must look to your attorneys for the rest."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Stoddard, "isn't it perfectly legal? Won't the claim be open to location? Well, then, why this sudden resort to evasion and hairsplitting, and all over a mere detail?"

"I have told you before," answered Jepson impatiently, "that it's against the ethics of my profession. I am a mining engineer and if you want this claim jumped——"

"Oh, yes, yes! We won't argue the matter! Who is this Mr. Bray?"

"He's a man with nerve—about the only one in the country that will stand up to Rimrock Jones. It seems that Jones won his saloon away from him and gave it to one of his friends. Some gambling feud they've had on for years, but now Mr. Bray is broke. I haven't sounded him, but for a thousand dollars——"

"Five hundred!"

"Now, Mr. Stoddard!" burst out Jepson complainingly, "you don't understand the gravity of this case. Do you realize that already one man has been killed in trying to jump that claim? And Rimrock Jones has made the threat openly that he will kill any man who does it!"

"He's a blusterer—a braggart—a criminal, through and through! Well, make it a thousand dollars. Now one thing more—is there any chance that Mr. Lockhart may still break up all our plans? As I understand

it, Jones gave him his orders to see that the assessment work was done. There are still nine days before the first of January, and it struck me that he was repenting of his bargain. You must watch him carefully—he doesn't seem trustworthy—and positively we must have no slip-up now. Does he actually know that this work has been neglected—and that, if not performed, it will invalidate the claim?"

"Yes, he knows it," answered Jepson wearily. "I've been stuffing money into his bank until he has over a million in deposits, and still the old screw isn't satisfied. He's crazy over money—and yet he's just as crazy over standing A1 with Jones. You don't realize, Mr. Stoddard, what a strain I've been under in trying to make that man run true."

"Well, give him anything. We must win at all hazards before this thing gets back to Jones. We have cut off his money by the construction of this smelter, but that can't be done again; and, once he begins to accumulate his profits, we'll find him a dangerous man. But we have passed this dividend and before I get through with him he'll be stripped of every dollar he has won. I'm going to break that man, Jepson, if only as an example to these upstarts who are hounding Navajoa. I've got him by the heels and—but never mind that, let's see if our plans are air-tight. Now, this man Lockhart!"

"He's drunk!" answered Jepson. "I'll arrange it to keep him soaked."

"Very well—now Bray!"

"He's drinking, too. I'll wait till the last day, and probably send him out with a guard."

"Yes, make sure of that. Better send two guards. They can sign their names as witnesses, in case Bray should leave the Territory. And now, this girl!" went on Stoddard, lowering his voice instinctively, "is she really as deaf as she seems? Remember, you can never depend on a woman!"

"Yes, she's deaf!" replied Jepson. "And you don't need to worry—she hates Rimrock Jones like poison. Did you notice the way she passed that dividend, to cut off his supply of slush? Just as sweet and smiling! When they take it like that—well, we can forget about her!"

He paused and in the silence a typewriter began to clack with a fierce, staccato note. It was Mary Fortune, writing her letter to Rimrock Jones.

CHAPTER XXII

A Fool

THE big day came for which Rimrock had waited, the day when he could strike his first blow. In his room at the Waldorf he had installed special telephone connections, with a clerk to answer his calls; and close by the table, where he could follow his campaign, a stock ticker stamped away at its tape. It was the morning of the twenty-third of December, and he had wired L. W. for his money. All was ready now for the first raid on Navajoa and he went down to see Buckbee, the broker.

"Mr. Buckbee," he said when he had him by himself, "I just want to find where you're at. You introduced me to Stoddard and, as it turned out, we all of us made on the deal. But here's the question—if it came to a show-down, would you be for Stoddard, or me?"

"Why, my dear friend Rimrock," answered Buckbee jovially, "I'm afraid you don't get me right. That little deal with Stoddard was strictly on the side—my business is to buy and sell stock. An order from you will look just as good to me as one from Whitney H. Stoddard, and it will be executed just as carefully. But if it's Navajoa you have on your mind my advice is positively to lay off. I'll buy or sell as much Nava-

joa as you want for the regular brokerage fee, but get this straight—when you go up against Stoddard you stand to lose your whole roll. Now shoot, and I give you my word of honor to execute your orders to the letter."

"All right," said Rimrock, "sell ten thousand shares short. Dump 'em over—I want Navajoa to go down."

"It'll go down," answered Buckbee as he scribbled out the order. "At what point do you want me to buy?"

"Don't want to buy," replied Rimrock grimly and Buckbee shook his head.

"All right, my boy," he said debonairly, "there'll be wild doings this day in Navajoa. But it's people like you that makes the likes of me rich, so divvel another word will I say."

Rimrock returned to his room and sat watching the tape as the ticker champed it out and soon he saw Navajoa. It had been quoted at thirty-two and a half, but this sale was made at thirty. He watched it decline to twenty-eight, and twenty-five, and soon it was down to twenty. He called up Buckbee.

"Sell ten thousand more," he ordered and Buckbee went on with the slaughter. Navajoa went down to eighteen and sixteen and then it jumped back to twenty. Big buying developed, but still Rimrock sold short and again Navajoa slumped. At the end of the day it stood at twenty and he prepared for the next step in his campaign. He had beaten Navajoa down

to nearly half its former price and without parting with a single share. He had at that moment, in stock bought and paid for, enough to cover all his short selling—this raid was to call out more. When stock is going up the people cling to it, but when it drops they rush to sell. Already he could see the small sales of the pikers as they were shaken down for their shares. The next thing to do, as he had learned the game, was to buy in; and then hammer it again.

On the twenty-fourth, the day before Christmas, he bought till he could buy no more; and still the price stayed down. It was the holidays slump, so the brokers said, but it suited him to a nicety. The next day was Christmas and he wired once more for his money, for L. W. had not answered his first telegram; and then he went out with the boys. Since his break with Mrs. Hardesty he had taken to dodging into the bar, where he could be safe from her subtle advances; but on Christmas eve he went too far. They all went too far, in the matter of drinking, but Rimrock went too far with Buckbee. He told him just exactly what he intended to do to Stoddard; which was indiscreet, to say the least. But Buckbee, who was likewise in an expansive mood, told in turn everything he knew; and the following day, as Rimrock thought it over, he wondered if he had not been wrong.

Buckbee had assured him that the stock on the market represented less than half of the Navajoa capitalization; and if that was the case it was hopeless,

of course, to try to break Stoddard's control. But, strictly as a friend and for old time's sake, Buckbee had offered to sell Rimrock's stock at a profit; he had even gone further and promised to pass it on to Stoddard, who was in the market to protect his holdings. At twenty-four, which was where it was selling, Rimrock would clean up a tidy sum; and every cent of that absolute velvet would come out of Stoddard's pocket. It was a great temptation, but as Rimrock sobered he remembered that it was a fight to a finish. He had set out to break Whitney Stoddard.

The next morning at ten he sat at his desk waiting expectantly for the Stock Exchange to open. It was to have been his big day when, with over a million dollars from his dividends, he had intended to buy in Navajoa. But there was one thing that left him uneasy —his money had not come. If it had been sent by registered mail the Christmas glut would easily account for the delay, but three telegrams had remained also unanswered. He pondered for a moment, whether to wire to Mary or not, and then the telephone rang.

"Hello?" said a voice, "this is Buckbee speaking. "What do you think about the proposition I made?"

"What proposition?" demanded Rimrock and then he grunted intolerantly as Buckbee renewed his offer for the stocks. "You must be drunk!" he said at the end and a merry laugh came back over the 'phone.

"No, all joking aside—I'm sober now. What do you say to twenty-four?"

"Too little!" bluffed Rimrock. "I want at least thirty."

"Will you take that?"

"No!" replied Rimrock, "nor thirty-five. I'm in the market to buy!"

"Well, how much do you want, then?" began Buckbee eagerly, "it's all the same to me. As long as it moves and I get my commission I don't care who buys the stock. But I'll tell you one thing—you'll have to put up more margin if you start to bidding it up. Twenty per cent., at the least, and if it goes above thirty I'll demand a full fifty per cent. You want to remember, Old Scout, that every time you buy on a margin the bank puts up the rest; and if that stock goes down they'll call your loan and you're legally liable for the loss. You'll have to step lively if you buck Whitney H. Stoddard—he's liable to smash the price down to nothing."

"I'll show him!" gritted Rimrock, "but I'll call up that bank first and find out just how far I can go. A man like me, worth fifty millions at least——"

"Ye-es!" jeered Buckbee, and as the broker hung up Rimrock called the president of the bank. It took time to get him, but when Rimrock stated his case he promised an immediate report. The answer came within half an hour—he could borrow up to five hundred thousand.

"All right," said Rimrock, and calling up Buckbee he told him to go ahead and buy.

"How much?" enquired Buckbee.

"Buy all you can get," answered Rimrock briefly and hurried off to the bank.

"Now about this loan," said the president pleasantly, "I find we have already given you money on your note up to nearly the entire five hundred thousand. Of course there's no question of your ability to pay, but wouldn't it be more businesslike if you could put up a little collateral?"

"For instance?" said Rimrock and at the note of antagonism the president was quick to explain.

"Of course you understand," he went on cordially, "you are good, as far as I'm concerned. But we have such troublesome things as bank examiners, and the law is very strict. In fact, a loan of half a million dollars on the unendorsed note of one man——"

"How much do you want?" asked Rimrock and fetched out a great sheaf of Navajoa.

"Well—not Navajoa," said the banker uneasily, "we have quite a lot of that already, on brokers' loans. Mr. Buckbee, you know. But if you would just put up, say two thousand shares of Tecolote——"

"No!"

"We could loan you up to two million."

The president paused and glanced at him mildly, but Rimrock had thrown down his stock.

"No," he said, "you can take this Navajoa or I'll quit and go somewhere else. I wouldn't put up a single share of Tecolote if you'd give me your whole, danged bank."

"Very well," said the president with a fleeting smile, "we'll accept your Navajoa. My secretary will arrange it—but mind this is on a call loan! Give him credit for five hundred more," he added and the clerk showed Rimrock out.

There are certain formalities that the richest must observe before they can borrow half a million and it was nearly noon before Rimrock was free and on his way to the hotel. He was just leaping out of his taxicab when he saw Mrs. Hardesty reeling towards him.

"Oh, Rimrock!" she gasped, "I've had such a blow —won't you take me back to my rooms? Oh, I can't explain it, but Whitney H. Stoddard is trying to force me to give up my stock! That Tecolote stock——"

"Here, get into this taxi!" said Rimrock on the instant, "now where do you want to go?"

"To the St. Cyngia on Ninety-fifth Street—and hurry!" she commanded; and the chauffeur slammed the door.

"Now what's the matter?" demanded Rimrock hurriedly. "I haven't got a minute to spare. Did you notice Navajoa? Well, I've got a buy order in——"

"Oh, no! I've seen nothing—not since he sent me that message! It seems he's back in town."

"Who? Whitney Stoddard? Well, let me get out then—I've got to get back to that tape!"

"Oh, no!" she murmured sinking against him with a shudder, "don't go and leave me alone. I need your

help, Rimrock! My whole fortune is involved. It's either that or give back the stock."

"What stock?" asked Rimrock, "that two thousand Tecolote? Well, you just give that to *me!* Have you really got it, or are you just stalling? Let me look at it and I'll see you through hell!"

"It's in my apartment," she answered weakly. "I'll show it to you when we are there. Ah, Rimrock, something told me you would come to save me. But—oh, I'm ready to fall."

She dropped against him and the startled Rimrock took her quickly within his arm. They rode on swiftly and as she lay panting on his breast she told him the story of her misfortune.

"I don't deserve it," she said, "to have you help me, because I started to do you a wrong. I didn't know you then, nor your generous heart—and so I made the agreement with Stoddard. I was to go to Gunsight and get acquainted with you and get you to come back to New York—and for that I was to receive two thousand shares of Tecolote stock. Oh, not as a present—I'd never think of that—but far below what they are worth. It would take all the money I had in the world just to make a part payment on the stock. But I knew how wonderfully valuable they were and so I took the chance."

She sighed and leaned against him closer while Rimrock listened eagerly for the rest.

"Can you understand now why I've seemed worried

and anxious and why I've concealed my affairs? I went there and met you, but when I refused to betray you I found I was caught in a trap. Whitney Stoddard is hounding you in every possible way to make you give up your mine, and after I refused to give back my stock he set out deliberately to ruin me!"

She shuddered and lay silent and Rimrock moved uneasily.

"What was it he wanted you to do?" he asked at last and she tore herself swiftly away.

"I can't tell you—here. But come up to my rooms. I defied him, but I did it for you."

She fell quickly to rearranging her hair and hat in preparation for the short dash past the doorman and at the end she looked at him and smiled.

"I knew you would come," she said; and as he helped her out he thrilled to the touch of her hand. At odd times before she had seemed old and blasé, but now she was young and all-alive. He dismissed the taxi without a thought of his business and they hurried up to her apartments. She let herself in and as she locked the door behind them she reached up and took his big hat.

"You must stay a while," she said. "The servants are gone and I have no one to protect me if they come to serve the papers. Just start the fire—and if anyone knocks don't let them break down the door."

She smiled again and a sudden giddiness seemed to blind Rimrock and make him doubt where he was.

He looked about at the silken rugs and the luxurious hangings on the walls and wondered if it was the same place as before. Even when he lit the laid fire and sank down on a divan he still felt the sweet confusion of a dream; and then she came back, suddenly transformed by a soft house-gown, and looked him questioningly in the face.

"Can you guess," she asked as she sat down beside him, "what it was that he wanted me to do? No, not to betray you or get possession of your stock—all he asked was that I should marry you."

"Marry me!" exclaimed Rimrock and his keen, staring eyes suddenly narrowed as she bowed her head.

"Yes, marry you," she said. "That was what made it so hard. Did you notice, when I stopped inviting you here? I was afraid, my Rimrock; I was afraid I might forget and—marry you. That was the one spot where Stoddard's plan failed, he forgot that I might fall in love. I loved you, Rimrock, loved you too much to marry you, and so I broke up all his plans. If I had married you, don't you see how easy it would have been for me to get hold of your stock? And that girl out there—the one I don't like—she would have thrown her vote to Stoddard. That alone would give him control, they would have fifty per cent. of the stock."

"No they wouldn't," corrected Rimrock, "not if you've got that two thousand. That would give *us* fifty-one per cent!"

A shadow of annoyance passed over her face, as if some part of her plan had gone wrong, and then her eyes took on a fire.

"*'Us?'*" she said. "Would you have married me, Rimrock? But surely, not for the stock! Oh, I wish sometimes——" She stopped abruptly and looked at him strangely and then she hurried on. "Ah, no," she sighed, "that can never be—you are in love with that other woman—out there. When you met her at the opera, you forgot all about me. You went off and left me alone. If Whitney H. Stoddard had called me up then!" Her eyes flashed dangerously and she looked away, at which Rimrock glanced quickly at his watch.

"By—grab!" he exclaimed half-rising to his feet, "do you know it's half-past twelve? Say, where's your telephone? I've got a deal on in Navajoa and I've just got to find out where I am!"

She rose up suddenly and turned to face him with a look of queenly scorn.

"I have no telephone!" she answered evenly, "and if I did have I would not lend it to you. You're just like the rest of these men, I see; you think in terms of stocks. I should have done as Stoddard said, and paid you back for your rudeness. Do you know, Mr. Jones, that you think more of money than of anything else in the world? Are you aware of the fact that all the love and devotion that any poor woman might bestow would be wholly wasted, and worse than

wasted, on a miserable stock-gambler like you! Ah, I was a fool!" she burst out, stamping her foot in a passion; and then she sank back on the divan and wept.

Rimrock stood and gazed at her, then glanced absently at his watch and looked about, shamefaced, for a 'phone. But in that elegant apartment, with its rich furnishings and tapestries there was no place for a crude, commercial telephone, and the door to the inner room was closed. He turned towards the outer door, for his business was urgent, but she had carried off the key. He stirred uneasily, and a shrewd doubt assailed him for her weeping seemed all at once sophisticated and forced; and at the moment she raised her head. One look and she had cast herself upon him and twined her arms about his neck.

"I can't help it! I can't help it!" she sobbed convulsively and drew down his head and kissed him. "I can't help it!" she whispered. "I love you, Rimrock; I can't bear to let you go!"

She clung to him passionately and with tremulous laughter tugged to draw him back to the divan, but Rimrock stood upright and stubborn. Some strange influence, some memory, seemed to sweep into his brain and make him immune to her charm. It was the memory of a kiss, but not like her kisses; a kiss that was impulsive and shy. He pondered laboriously, while he took hold of her hands and slowly drew them away, and then his strong grip tightened. It was the kiss that Mary had given him in prison, when she had

laid her cheek against the bars! That kiss had haunted him through the long months of waiting, and it rose in his memory now, when perhaps it were better forgotten. He put away the hands that still clung and petted and gazed fiercely into her eyes. And the woman faced him—without a tear on her cheek for all the false weeping she had done.

"How's this?" he said and as she sensed his suspicion she jerked back in sudden defiance.

"A stock-jobber!" she mocked. "All you think of is money. The love of a woman is nothing to you!"

"Aw, cut out that talk!" commanded Rimrock brutally. "Some women are stock-jobbers, too. And speaking of stock, just give me a look at those two thousand shares of Tecolote."

A sullen, sulky pout distorted her mouth and she made a face like a wilful girl.

"You'd snatch them," she said, "and run away and leave me. And then what would I say to Stoddard?"

"Are you working for him?" he asked directly and she threw out her arms in a pet.

"No! I wish I were, but it's too late now. I might have made money, but as it is I stand to lose everything."

"Oh, you stand to lose everything, do you? Well say, that reminds me, I guess I stand about the same!"

He picked up his hat and started for the door, but she caught him by the arm.

"You're going to that woman!" she hissed vindic-

tively, "perhaps I can tell you something about *her*. Well, I can!" she declared, "and I can prove it, too. I can prove it by my Tecolote stock."

"You haven't got any stock," answered Rimrock roughly. But he stopped and she drew back and smiled.

"Oh!" she said as she noted his interest, "you're beginning to believe me now. Well, I can show you by the endorsement where she sold out to Stoddard over a month before I came. She sold him two thousand shares of Tecolote for exactly two million dollars —and that's why she left when I came. She was afraid you would find her out. But you, you poor fool, you thought she was perfect; and had left because her feelings were hurt! But she couldn't fool me, I could read her like a book, and I'll tell you what she has done."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" broke in Rimrock savagely, "you'll go and get me that stock. I won't believe a word you say——"

"What will you give me if I do?" she demanded coquettishly at the same time backing away.

"I'll give you a nice, sweet kiss!" answered Rimrock, twisting his mouth to a sinister smile. "And if you don't——"

"Ah, will you?" she cried as she started towards him and then she danced mockingly away.

"You can keep it for her!" she flung back bitterly and passed out through the inner door.

Like a lion held in leash Rimrock paced up and down and then he listened through the door. All was silent and with a sudden premonition he laid a quick hand on the knob. The door was locked against him! He listened again, then spoke through the keyhole, then raised his voice to a roar. The next moment he set his great shoulder to the panel, then drew back and listened again. A distant sound, like a door softly closing, caught his ear and all was still. He hurled himself with desperate vehemence against the door so treacherously locked and with a crash it leapt from its hinges and he stumbled into the room. From where he stood Rimrock looked about in a daze, for the room was stripped and bare. The table, the furnishings, all that had made it so intimate when he had dined with the tiger lady before; all were gone and with the bareness there came a chill and the certainty that he had been betrayed. He turned and rushed to the outer entrance, but as he laid violent hands on that door it opened of itself and with such unexpected suddenness that he fell backwards on the floor. He rose up cursing, for something told him whose hand had unlocked the door; but she was gone and all that remained was a scribbled card in the hall.

"Kiss your money good-bye," was written on its face and on the back:

"I hate a fool."

CHAPTER XXIII

Sold Out

WHAT a fool he was and how much the tiger lady hated him Rimrock was already in a position to judge, but the inner meaning of "Kiss your money good-bye!" was still to be disclosed. As he dashed down the hall and out into the street and into the first taxi that passed it seemed but a cynical way of saying that his sole sweetheart was gold; but when he reached his room and glanced at the tape its meaning was written plain. Navajoa was quoted at six. He brushed aside his excited clerk and called up Buckbee on the 'phone.

"What?" yelled Buckbee as he recognized his voice, "have you been here all the time? My God, man, I've got the whole police department after you! You've ruined me! I've gone to the wall! Yes, bankrupt, I tell you, unless you go to the bank and put up collateral for my loans. Why didn't you tell me you only had credit of a million dollars in all? You said: 'Buy all you can get!' and by the gods they threw it in my face with both hands! Hundreds of shares, thousands of shares! And then when I called you up your clerk said you had gone. Well, I had

my orders and you can't say I weakened—I bought thirty-two thousand shares!"

"'Thirty-two thousand!' Well, what are you kicking about? That gives me control of the mine. But say, what the devil does this ticker mean, quoting Navajoa at six dollars a share?"

"It means!" shouted Buckbee, "that you bid up the market until I paid forty-three for the last and then Whitney H. Stoddard dumped every share he had and cut the ground out under your feet! You're obligated to make up a total deficiency of nearly a million at the bank; your loans have been called, and mine have been called, and the stock is forfeit for the debt. You've lost your stock that you bought on a margin and unless you can take up these loans, every blessed share of Navajoa will go to Stoddard and his bank."

"To Stoddard! Well, what does that bank outfit mean by grabbing all my shares? Ain't my name good for about fifty million? Did I ever default on a debt? I'm going right down there and tell that president to give me back every share, and if he don't——"

"Oh, now don't talk that stuff! Just go down and put up some collateral. That's all that will save you—they've got the law behind them and they're strictly within their rights. No, now listen! You borrowed a half a million dollars at the bank this morning and put up your Navajoa for collateral. It was worth twenty-four then, but now, by my ticker, it's only five and a half. Can't you see where you are? Stoddard

That was Rimrock's notice, but now it was void for the hour was long after twelve

caught you napping and he'll never let up till you're broke. You valued it at thirty, but he'll keep the market down to nothing until you settle up and liquidate those claims. Then the prices will soar, but you won't be in on it. He's got you trimmed, and no mistake."

"But I don't see it!" came back Rimrock insistently. "I want every one of those shares. And I've got the money—it ought to be here now—to pay every cent I owe. Say, come on up, Buckbee, and help me straighten this thing out—I was unexpectedly called away."

He hung up the 'phone and turned to the letters and telegrams that were strewn about the desk. There were notices from the bank and frantic demands that he put up more margin on his stock and a peremptory announcement that his loans had been called and must be taken up by the next day at noon—and a letter from Mary Fortune. He thrust it aside and searched again for some letter or telegram from L. W., and then he snatched up hers. There was something wrong and her letter might explain it—it might even contain his check.

He tore it open and read the first line and then the world turned black. The dividend had been passed! He hurled the letter down and struck it with his fist. Passed! He turned on his clerk and motioned him from the room with the set, glassy stare of a madman. Passed! And just at the time when he needed the

money most! He picked up the letter and read a little further and then his hand went slack. She had voted against him—it was her vote and Stoddard's that had carried the day against L. W.! He dropped the letter into a gaping wastebasket and sat back grinding his teeth.

"Damn these women!" he moaned and when Buckbee found him he was still calling down curses on the sex. In vain Buckbee begged him to pull himself together and get down to figures and facts, he brushed all the papers in a pile before him and told him to do it himself. Buckbee made memoranda and called up the bank, and then called up Stoddard himself; and still Rimrock sat cursing his luck. Even when Buckbee began to read the final statement his mind was far away—all he heard was the lump sum he owed, a matter of nearly a million.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said, when Buckbee came to an end, "I'll fix it so you don't lose a cent. But that bank is different. They sold me out to Stoddard and peddled me my own stock twice. Now don't say a word, because I know better—it was like Davey Crockett's coonskin, that he kept stealing from behind the bar. They take my stock for security and then hand it to Stoddard and he sells it over to you, and by the time we get through Stoddard has still got the stock and I owe the bank a million. Those may not be big words but that's what's happened, like Crockett buying the drinks with his coonskin; but if they col-

lect from me they'll have to sue. Now how can I fix it for you?"

"Well, just raise the money to meet my shortage—it's a matter of nearly six hundred thousand."

"All right," said Rimrock, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I just got some bad news from the mine. That big dividend that I absolutely counted on to meet all those obligations was held up—it wasn't passed. But here's the point: the money is still there, right in old L. W.'s bank; the only question is how to get it out. You show me how I can borrow on that tied-up dividend and I'll pay you back every dollar."

"The easiest thing in the world!" exclaimed Buckbee. "All you have to do is to put up your Tecolote stock."

"Nothing doing," said Rimrock, "show me some other way. You fellows know all the tricks."

"No, there's no other way," responded Buckbee earnestly. "That's the only way you can touch it, until the dividend is declared. The surplus in the bank is regarded in law simply as increasing the value of the shares; and so all you have to do is to prove its existence and put up your stock as security."

"And then, if I don't pay it back, the bank will keep my stock!" Rimrock stated it guardedly, but his eyes were snapping and his mouth had become suddenly hard. "Don't you ever think it!" he burst out. "I don't put up that stock! No, by grab, not a single share of it, if I lose every cent I've got and leave my

best friend in the hole! Do you know what I think?" he demanded portentously as he shook his finger under Buckbee's nose. "I believe every doggoned woman and broker in the whole crooked city of New York is working for—Whitney—H.—Stoddard!"

He paused and at a sudden guilty glance he dropped his hand and started back.

"My God!" he cried, "not you, too, Buckbee? Don't tell me you're in on it, too! Well, I might as well quit, then! What's the use of trying when every friend you've got turns out a crook!" He slumped down in his chair and, rumpling up his hair, gazed at Buckbee with somber eyes. "So! Old friend Buckbee, too? Well, Buckbee, what's the deal? Just tell me where I'm at and I'll leave this cursed town forever."

"Too bad, Old Scout," answered Buckbee kindly, "but you know I warned you, from the first. I'm a Stoddard man, and I told you to lay off—but here's where he's got you now. You owe money to his bank, and you owe it to me, and he's guaranteed us both against loss. Now he might step in and get a judgment against you and tie up every share you've got; but all he wants—and he told me so himself—is four thousand shares of Tecolote. That gives him control and, I'll tell you frankly, he's going to get those shares."

"Oh, he is, is he?" said Rimrock and then sat silent while Buckbee bit the tip from a cigar.

"Yes, he's going to get them," went on Buckbee

quietly, "but here's how it looks to me. The loss you will suffer from those four thousand shares will be more than made up by the increase in the dividends on the rest. You are not a good business man and, more than that, you have gone off and neglected your mine. But give Stoddard the control and, the way he'll manage it, your stock will bring you in more. You've learned your lesson—just hold on to the rest and you'll always have money to burn. *But,* if you try to buck him, as sure as God made little fishes, he'll have your hide on the fence."

"D'ye think so?" enquired Rimrock and again he sat silent while Buckbee puffed away at his cigar.

"Yes, he's a hard man to whip," went on Buckbee thoughtfully, "they call him the Iron Man. Any place you hit him you only break your hand; but when he comes back—zowie!"

"Well, I guess you're right," answered Rimrock slowly, "New York is no place for me. It's back to the cactus where they fight it out with sixshooters and the man that wins grabs the loot. But here you can get some kind of a judgment and let the sheriff do the job."

Buckbee laughed lightheartedly and slapped him on the back, but Rimrock did not even smile.

"By George," exclaimed Buckbee, "I'll be sorry to lose you. You do have a way of putting things. But say, Old Sport, let's get this painful business over. When can you arrange to turn in that stock?"

"I don't know," grumbled Rimrock, "I'll have to think this over—maybe call in a lawyer or two. I'm not so sure about those hands-up judgments."

"Why, my dear boy," exclaimed Buckbee, "you don't doubt for a moment that a bank can attach your stock? You must bear in mind that they loaned you half a million on your mere name stuck to a note. Not a cent of collateral—and on the other half million you were distinctly notified it could be called. Why, the banks have a department where they grind out these actions just exactly as a mill grinds out corn. It's the simplest thing in the world."

"Well, I'll think it over," answered Rimrock non-committally, "unless you've got one of those attachments on you?"

"Oh, no!" laughed Buckbee, "I'm no summons-server. It isn't quite so simple as that. You see the bank begins the action, the court issues a summons, and if you don't appear the judgment is declared by default. But it won't come to that, I'm sure. Just think it over and I'll call you up later. So long; don't take it too hard."

He flashed back a smile, but as the door closed behind him Rimrock answered by showing his teeth. He went to a safe that stood in the room and took out a single envelope. Then he strapped on his shabby old six-shooter, stepped quietly out and was gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

The New Year

A CRAFTY-EYED lawyer on an East-side street told Rimrock all he needed to know—a summons in equity could not be served outside the bounds of the state. And so, a year after his triumphal arrival, Rimrock Jones left gay New York. He slipped out of town with a mysterious swiftness that baffled certain officers of the court, but, though Jepson watched the trains in something approaching a panic, he did not drop off at Gunsight. Mary Fortune watched the trains, too, though with different motives and hopes, and when the last day dawned and no Rimrock appeared she went off by herself on the desert.

When that sun rose again, unless something was done, the Tecolote mine would be lost. And all because Rimrock did not come. His share in the mine as well as her own was dependent upon what she should do and she motored out across the desert to think. Jepson's plans were complete—L. W. was still drunk and Ike Bray was waiting for the word. At midnight that night, as the old year went out and the new year was ushered in, Ike Bray and his guards would climb up to the dome and re-locate the Old Juan claim. And

then they would leave it—for that was their plan—and let Rimrock contend with the law. Once located and recorded they had ninety days in which to sink their discovery shaft, and the last day was as good as the first.

Mary had overheard Jepson in his numerous consultations until she knew every move he would make; the question was, what would she do? Would she sit idly by and let this mountain of copper be snatched from their hands by Stoddard; or would she, alone and with no one to help her, brave the darkness and locate it herself? Already, as she nerved herself for the deed, she had typed out her location notice in duplicate; filling in the exact description of the boundaries from the records of the Old Juan claim. But would she dare to post that notice, in the face of three desperate men? Would she dare risk a meeting with drunken Ike Bray on the summit of that lonely peak? She resolved and recanted, and resolved again and drove back to the hotel in despair.

From the day she had known him she had helped Rimrock Jones in every way that she could; but he from the first had neglected every duty and followed after every half-god. She had written him to come, and told him of his peril, and that her own rights were jeopardized with his own; and he answered never a word. A hot wave passed over her, of passionate resentment and hatred and womanly scorn, and she drew her lips to a line. She would jump the Old

Juan, but she would jump it for herself and hold it against both Rimrock and Stoddard!

It had once been observed that, when driven too far, Mary Fortune became an Indian; and the man who said it knew. For the rest of that day she was afire with a resolution which contemplated even the killing of men. She bought her a pistol and, driving out on the desert, she practised until she could shoot. Then as the sun sank low and Jepson and his men were occupied with sobering up Ike Bray, she drove off in the direction of Geronimo. She was far out on the desert when darkness fell, rushing south on the other road to Tecolote. Within sight of the camp she put out her lamps and, turning her machine out of the road, she crept along until it was hidden from view, then leapt out and started for the butte. It stood against the stars, huge and sinister in its black bulk, and she shuddered as she took the lone trail.

Up that very same path the year before Rimrock Jones had rushed on to defend his claim. He had been a man then, or at least a fighting animal; but now he was a soft, pampered brute. He left his fighting to be done by a woman while he spent his money like a fool. The fierce anger from that thought gave courage to her heart and her resentment spurred her on. She toiled on and rested and gazed despairingly at the high crags, but still she kept her face to the heights. As midnight approached and the trail had no ending she stopped and gazed doubtfully back, and

then she went hurrying on. A clanking of rocks and the bass guffaw of men had come up to her from below; and terror supplied a whip that even hatred lacked—it was Ike Bray and his drunken guards!

As she staggered to the rim and dragged herself past the wall where McBain had come to his death it seemed as if she must drop, but the men were coming behind. She drew a great sobbing breath and, with her hand on her pistol, hastened over to the discovery shaft. It was a black, staring hole and by the dump beside it there stood a sign-post supported by rocks. A pale half moon had risen in the East and by its light she made out the notice that was tacked to the center of the board. That was Rimrock's notice, but now it was void for the hour was long after twelve. She tore it down and stuffed it into her pocket and drew out the one she had prepared. Then, gumming it carefully from a tube of glue, she posted it on the board. Already the voices were coming nearer, but there was one thing more to do—she lit a match and, looking at her watch, wrote the exact time on the blanks.

In the brief half hour that was occupied by Ike Bray in making the last lap of his trip Mary lived in an agony of fear. He came up slowly, using such violent language as she had never heard before; and, combined with the curses that he called down on the guards, was the demand for drink, and more drink. As she crouched behind a boulder that stood on the rim she

bit her lips with shame and the hot rush of anger at his obscene revilings made her reconciled to killing him, if she must. He was lower than the lowest of created animals, a vile, degenerate beast; and as he struggled to the top and made for the monument his curses were directed against Rimrock.

"I'll show him!" he vaunted as he swayed before the sign, "I'll show him if Ike Bray's afraid. He can run a blazer over lawyers and women; but me—hey, tear off this notice!"

There was a minute of fumbling and then, as she gazed out at them, the taller guard spoke up.

"It's stuck," he said, "tighter than the back door of hell. Let it go and nail yours on top. Holy Smoke, if I'd knowed what a job this was—here, what are you doing now? Aw, give me that notice! Now where's your tacks? Say, Hank, pull him back from that hole!"

The sound of hammering came to her ears, half-drowned by a drunken brawl, and then there was a horror-stricken yell.

"He's fell down the hole! Are you hurt bad, Ike?"

The answer was a muffled curse, and both guards hurried to the shaft. With a prayer on her lips Mary crept from her shelter, then crouched and ran for the trail. She saw them leaning over the shaft and heard them bandying oaths and then she had gained the path.

"What's that?" cried one as she knocked a stone from the wall, and as it clattered she went dashing

down the trail. She fell and lay breathless, listening dully for their footsteps, then rose up and went limping on. She paused for strength far down the path, where it swings along the wall, and her heart beat loud in her breast. They were still on the cliff-tops, still cursing and quarrelling and poisoning the clean silence with their words—but she had located first!

The day was breaking when, lost and wandering, she found her machine on the plain, but as it took the smooth road and went gliding towards Geronimo she smiled with a great sense of power. It was not alone that she controlled that throbbing engine, which made the car pulsate and thrill; she had a handle that would make two men she knew bow down and ask her for peace—Rimrock Jones and Whitney Stoddard. She appeared the next morning at the Recorder's office with a copy of her notice for record. Her torn clothes were concealed beneath a full cloak and her hands within automobile gloves; but the clerk, even in the rush of New Year recording, glanced curiously at a bruise across her forehead. Then he filed her claim with a hundred others and she slipped out and drove away.

When Mary Fortune returned to Gunsight she found the whole town in an uproar. Men were running to and fro and a great crowd of people was gathered in front of the hotel. If she had feared for a moment that the scar above her eye, which she had covered so artfully with her hair, might be noticed by Jepson and others, that fear was instantly allayed. There

was bigger news afoot—Ike Bray had come to town and given notice that he had jumped the Old Juan claim. He was backed up now against a plate-glass window of the Tecolote Mining Company's office and Jepson was making a speech. As she drove up closer she could see Hassayamp Hicks and as the crowd shouted he broke in on Jepson's disavowal.

"That ain't the question, suh!" he shouted fiercely, "we want to know *who paid him!* And as a personal friend of Mr. Jones, the best man in this hyer town, I wish to say right now that the Old Juan claim can't be jumped by *nobody!*"

"Just a moment, Mr. Hicks!" interrupted Jepson patiently, but the mob was shouting him down.

"It's a lie!" yelled Bray from his place against the window. "I jumped that claim for myself! I jumped it myself; and Rimrock Jones, nor none of his friends, can't come and take it away!"

"Oh, they can't, hey?" thundered a voice and Mary started as she saw a tall form through the crowd. It was L. W. Lockhart, the man who had sold Rimrock out and allowed the Old Juan to lapse. "They can't, you say? Well, I want to tell you they *can!* And, gun-play or not, they *will!*"

His high hat surged forward into the forbidden space that Bray had cleared with his gun and then a pistol shot rang out. The next moment the glass windows were swaying and bending beneath the weight of the mob. There was a babel of shouting, a quick

surge forward and then the crowd gave back. L. W. was coming out and as they gave way before him he addressed the men of Gunsight.

"I've got 'im, boys!" he cried in a frenzy, "come on, we'll string 'im up! We'll show 'im if he can jump Rimrock's claim!"

He came striding from the crowd, one arm hanging limp the other dragging the cursing Ike Bray.

"You got me!" he snarled, shaking Bray like a rat, "but dang you, I've got you, too!"

The mob fell in behind, but as they passed Mary's automobile Bray reached out and clutched it with both hands.

"Let go!" commanded L. W., still dragging at his collar while his bloody arm flapped with each jerk. "Let go, you dastard, or I'll skin you alive—you can't run no sandy over me! The man don't live, so help me God, that can rob a friend of mine!"

He turned back impatiently, but as he raised his boot to stamp on the clinging hands his eyes met Mary Fortune's.

"Don't let him kill me, lady!" gasped Ike Bray imploringly as he felt L. W.'s grip relax. "I only shot in self-defense."

"You'd better let him in here," suggested Mary as she hurriedly threw open the door. "I think it will be better that way."

"No, he robbed old Rimmy!" sobbed L. W. hysterically, "the best friend I ever had. And I was drunk

and let the assessment work lapse. My God, he'll kill me for this!"

"No, he won't!" she said and as she touched his hand L. W. let go and backed away.

"Well, all right, Miss Fortune," he stammered brokenly, "but—but he's got to git out of town!"

"I'll take him!" she answered and as the crowd fell back she speeded up and raced away.

"God bless you, ma'am," cried Ike Bray tremulously as she slowed up to let him down, "I'll do as much for you, some day! Is there anything, now, I can do?"

He had read the sudden wish in her eyes, but she hesitated long before she spoke.

"Yes," she said as she started ahead, "keep away from Rimrock Jones!"

CHAPTER XXV

An Accounting

ALL the next day, and the next, Mary watched the door and on the morning of the third Rimrock came. From motives of prudence the badly shaken Jepson had suggested that she see him first and she had consented with an understanding smile. He slipped in quietly, glancing furtively around, and then looked at her coldly in the eye.

"Well," he said with an accusing smile, "I see *you* sold out to Stoddard, too."

She turned away wearily and, picking up a letter, laid it down on the counter before him.

"There's a notice," she said as if she had not heard him, "that I've been asked to turn over to you."

He glanced at it impatiently and then, confused by its verbiage, looked up with a questioning scowl.

"What's all this?" he asked. And then, in a louder tone: "Where'd you get this paper?"

"It was sent to me," she answered, "as secretary of the Company. But it's only a matter of form. When you left New York a general summons was

published in a legal paper and in ninety days you will have to appear or lose your stock by default."

"Uhr! Pretty nice!" he sneered, and came in and sat down in a chair. "Pretty nice!" he repeated as he took off his hat and glanced around the room, "you must've known I was coming. What's the matter?" he burst out as she made no answer, "can't you hear, or don't you care?"

"I can hear," she replied categorically, "and I don't care."

"Oh! Like the rest of 'em, hey? Got no use for me, now. And so I'm summoned to appear in court? I come back home and the first thing you shove at me is this here little notice." He drummed on a desk with the rolled-up paper, but as she sighed he changed his tone. "Well, well," he said, "you've got things all changed since Rimrock was here before."

"Yes," she answered with her old-time pleasantness. "Mr. Jepson did it. I found it like this myself."

"'S that so?" observed Rimrock and gazed at her curiously. "How long ago was that?"

"Oh, back in November. It was about the twentieth. I came to send out the notices."

"Oh! Ah, yes! For the annual meeting. Well, you put a crimp in me then. Just by passing that dividend you dropped me so flat that I lost every dollar I had."

"Very likely," she observed with no sign of regret, "but you should have attended the meeting."

"Attended the meeting!" he repeated angrily. "I had something else to do! But is that any excuse for stopping my dividend and leaving me for Stoddard to clean?"

"If you had come to the meeting," she responded evenly, but with an answering fire in her eyes, "and explained that you needed the money, I might have voted differently. As it was I voted for the smelter."

"The smelter?"

"Why, yes! Didn't you get my letter? We're going to build a smelter."

"Oh, my Lord!" raved Rimrock, "did you let them fool you on that old, whiskered dodge? Sure I got your letter—but I never read it—the first few lines were enough! When I saw that you'd sold me out to Stoddard and gone and passed that dividend——" He paused—"Say, what's the matter?"

She had forgotten at last her studied calm and was staring at him with startled eyes.

"Why—didn't you read about Ike Bray?"

"Ike Bray! Why, no; what's the matter with Ike? I just came in—on the freight."

"Then you don't know that your claim has been jumped, and——"

"Jumped!" yelled Rimrock, rising suddenly to his feet and making a clutch for his gun.

"Yes—jumped! The Old Juan claim! The assessment work was never done."

"Uh!" grunted Rimrock and sank back into his chair

as if he had received a blow. "Not done?" he wailed staggering wildly up again. "My—God! Did L. W. go back on me, too? Didn't Hassayamp or anybody just think to go out there and see that the holes were sunk? Oh, my Lord; but this is awful!"

"Yes, it is," she said, "but it wouldn't have happened if you had come out here yourself. And if you'd just read my letter instead of throwing it down the minute it didn't happen to please——" She stopped and winked back the angry tears that threatened to betray her hurt. "But now go on, and blame me for this—you blame me for everything else! Curse and swear and ask me what *I* was doing when all this came to pass! Ah, you expect more of others, Mr. Rimrock Jones, than you ever do of yourself; and now it will be me or poor L. W. that will come in for all the——"

She broke down completely and buried her face in her arms while Rimrock stood staring like a fool. He was stunned, astounded; put beyond the power to listen, or reason, or think. All he knew was that some time, when he was away and while no one was there to befriend, Ike Bray his enemy had climbed up the butte and jumped the Old Juan claim. And all the time he was dallying in New York and playing his puny string at Navajoa the Old Juan claim and the mighty Tecolote had been left unguarded until they were jumped.

"Where's L. W.?" he asked, coming suddenly from

his trance; and she was sitting there, dry-eyed as before.

"He's gone to the hospital. Bray shot him through the arm in a quarrel over the claim."

"What? Shot L. W.? Well, the little shrimp! Just wait till I get to him with this!"

He tapped his pistol and a wry, cynical smile came over her tear-stained face.

"Yes! Wait!" she mocked. "You'll be a long time waiting. He's under the protection of the court. No, you can put up that pistol and never miss it—this case will be tried by law."

"Well, we'll see about that," he answered significantly. "I've got a look-in on this, myself."

"No, I don't think you have," she responded firmly. "The claim was the property of the Company."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, only this, that the case is out of your hands. Ike Bray has disappeared, the claim is recorded, and only the Company can sue."

"What, do you mean to say that when my claim is jumped I can't begin suit to get it back?"

"Why, certainly. You have transferred that claim to the Company."

"Well, why didn't Jepson do that work? Do you mean to say that that high-priced man, getting his twenty-five thousand a year, deliberately sat down and let that assessment work lapse and then let Ike Bray jump it?"

"Yes," she nodded, "that's it."

"But——" He stopped and a wave of sudden intelligence swept the passion from his face.

"It's Stoddard!" he said and once more she nodded, then waited with an understanding smile.

"Yes, it's Stoddard," she said. "But of course we can't prove it. Mr. Bray has already begun suit."

"What, suit to dispossess us? Does he claim the whole works? Well, there must be somebody behind him. You don't think it could be—what? Well, doesn't that—beat——"

"Yes, it does!" she cut in hastily. "The whole thing has been very carefully thought out."

He slapped his leg and, rising from his chair, paced restlessly to and fro.

"How'd you know all this?" he demanded at last and something in the nagging, overbearing way he said it woke the smouldering fires of her hate.

"Mr. Jones," she said rising up to face him, "we might as well understand each other right now. From the very first you have taken it for granted that I have sold you out. You don't need to deny it, because you have used those very words—but please don't do it again. And please don't speak to me in that tone of voice, as if I had done you some great wrong. *You* are the one that has done *me* a wrong and I assure you, I will never forget. But from this time on, if you want anything of me, please ask for it like a gentleman. Now what do you want to know?"

"I want to know," began Rimrock slowly and then he broke down and smote the desk. "You have too sold me out!" he exploded in a fury, "you have—I don't care what you say! You stood in with Stoddard to pass that dividend and, by grab, you can't deny it! If you'd voted with L. W.——"

"Very well!" returned Mary in a tone that silenced him, "I see that you don't wish to be friends. And I want to tell you, in parting, that you expect a constancy from women that you signally lack yourself. I will send Mr. Jepson down to be sworn at."

When Jepson, pale and anxious, sidled warily into the office he found Rimrock sitting thoughtfully in a chair. Some time had passed, for Jepson's wife had delayed him, but time alone could not account for the change. Rimrock was more than quiet, he was subdued; but when he looked up there was another change. In Abercrombie Jepson he saw, without question, the tool and servitor of Stoddard, the man who had engineered his downfall. And Jepson's smile as he came forward doubtfully—but with the frank, open manner he affected—was sickly and jaundiced with fear. It was a terrible position that he found himself placed in and his wife was crying, upstairs.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Jepson," said Rimrock pleasantly and put his hand behind his back.

"Good morning," returned Jepson, drawing in a deep breath, "is there anything I can do?"

"Yes," said Rimrock coldly. "I've been away for

some time. I'd like to know what's going on. You'll excuse me, Mr. Jepson, if I ask you a few questions about the jumping of the Old Juan claim."

"Ah, yes, yes," spoke up Jepson briskly, "very regrettable case, I'm sure. But you must remember, if you'll pardon my mentioning it, that I spoke of this possibility before. The Old Juan claim, as I told you at the time, placed our entire property in jeopardy. It should have been re-located before all this had happened; but I have turned over the whole affair to our attorneys, McVicker and Ord."

"And what do they think?"

"Well, as to that, I can't say. You see, I have really been frightfully busy. Still, they are a very good firm and I think very likely the affair can somehow be compromised. Looks very bad for the Company, as far as the law goes, if you should ask my private opinion; but all such litigation, while of course very expensive, generally results, in the end, in a compromise."

"Oh, a compromise, eh? Well, sit down a minute; I want to find out a few details. Do you think now, for instance, that Whitney H. Stoddard is back of this man, Ike Bray? Because if he is, and their claim is a good one, it might make some difference to me."

He said this so naturally and with such apparent resignation that Jepson almost rose to the bait, but he had learned Rimrock's ways too well. Such an admission as that, if made before the trial, might seri-

ously affect Stoddard's case. And besides, this was a matter for lawyers.

"Well, as to that, Mr. Jones," he replied apologetically, "I really cannot say. As superintendent of the mine, and lately as acting manager, I am fully occupied, I am sure——"

"Yes, no doubt," observed Rimrock, suddenly changing his tone, "but you've got more time, now—I'll take that manager job off your hands."

"What? Take charge of the mine again?" cried Jepson aghast. "Why, I thought——"

"Very likely," returned Rimrock, "but guess again. I'm still general manager, unless the Directors have fired me; and believe me, I'm going to take charge. In the next few days I'm going to go through this office with a six-shooter and a fine-tooth comb and if I find a single dollar paid out to Ike Bray some ex-manager is liable to get shot. You understand that, now don't you, Mr. Jepson? All right then; we can go ahead. Now will you kindly tell me how, as general manager and mine superintendent, and being worried so much over that claim, you came to let the ordinary assessment work lapse on the apex claim to our mine?"

He leaned back in his chair and put one hand in his pocket and Jepson broke into a sweat. It is no easy task for a man to serve two masters, and Rimrock had exposed a heavy pistol.

"Well—why, really!" burst out Jepson in despera-

tion, "I thought you had entrusted that to Mr. Lockhart. He told me so, distinctly, when I spoke of it in your absence, and naturally I let the matter drop."

"Yes, naturally," drawled Rimrock and as he reached for his handkerchief Jepson started and almost ran. "You're a great man, Jepson," he went on cuttingly, "a great little piece of mechanism. Now come through —what does Stoddard want?"

"Mr. Jones," began Jepson in his most earnest manner, "I give you my word of honor I don't know of what you are speaking."

"Oh, all right," answered Rimrock, "if that's the way you feel about it. You stand pat then, and pull the injured innocence? But you're not much good at it, Jepson; nothing like some people he has working for him. That fellow Buckbee is a corker. You're too honest, Jepson; you can't act the part, but Buckbee could do it to perfection. You should've been there to see him trim me, when I tried that little flier in Navajoa. Not an unkind word ever passed between us, and yet he busted me down to a dollar. He was a great fellow—you ought to know him—you could take a few leaves from his book.

"But here's the proposition as I look at it, Jepson," went on Rimrock with an ingratiating smile, "you're supposed to be strictly on the square. You're a solid, substantial, mining engineer, chiefly interested in holding your job. But on the side, as I happen to know, you're doing all this dirty work for Stoddard. Now—

as general manager, if I did my duty, I ought to fire you on the spot; but I'm going to give you a chance. So I'll make you an offer and you can take it or leave it. If you'll recognize my authority as general manager and tell me what I'm entitled to know, I'll leave you where you are; but if you don't I'll not only fire you, but I'll run you out of town. Now how about it—ain't I the legal manager of this Company?"

"Why—why, yes, Mr. Jones," stammered Jepson abjectly, "as far as that goes, I'm sure no one will object. Of course it was understood, between Mr. Stoddard and me, when you went East a year ago——"

"Yes, all right, Mr. Jepson," interrupted Rimrock easily, "now how much money have we got?"

"Why, as to that," began Jepson his eyes opening wider, "there is quite a sum in the bank. Some three millions, altogether, but the most of that is set aside for the construction of the smelter."

"Ah, yes! Exactly! But that was set aside before the Old Juan claim was jumped. A smelter's no good now, if we're going to lose our mine—it would be just like making a present of it to Ike Bray."

"Oh, but my dear Mr. Jones!" burst out Jepson in dismay, "you surely wouldn't stop the smelter now?"

"Well, I don't know why not," answered Rimrock briefly. "Don't you think so now, yourself?"

He gazed at his superintendent with an unwinking smile and Jepson bowed his head.

"Oh, very well, sir," he said with a touch of servility, "but Mr. Stoddard will be greatly put out."

"You're working for me!" spoke up Rimrock sharply, "and we'll spend that money for something else."

"Spend it?"

"Yes, for lawyers! I hate the whole outfit—they're a bunch of lousy crooks—but we'll see if money don't talk. I'm going to hire, Jepson, every lawyer in this Territory that's competent to practice in the courts. Now look at it fairly, as a business proposition; would it be right to do anything else? Here's a copper property that you could sell to-morrow for a hundred million dollars gold, and the apex claim is jumped. The whole title to the mine is tied up right there—they can claim every shovelful you mine, and your mill and your smelter to boot. What kind of a business man would I be if I left this to McVicker and Ord? No, I'm going to send to San Francisco, and Denver, and Butte, and retain every mining attorney I can get. It's the only thing to do; but listen, my friend, I'm not going to tell anybody but you. So if Stoddard finds this out, or McVicker and Ord, or whatever blackleg lawyers Ike Bray has, I'll just know where to go. And one thing more—if I find you've split on me, I'll kill you like a Mexican's dog."

He rose up slowly and looked Jepson in the eye with a glance that held him cold.

"Very well, sir," he said as he started to his feet. "And now, if you'll excuse me——"

"All right," nodded Rimrock and as he watched him pass out he gave way to a cynical smile.

"Good enough!" he said. "They can all go back on me, but there's one man I know I can trust!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A Chapter of Hate

IT was a source of real regret to Mary Fortune that she could not keep on hating Rimrock Jones. In the long, weary months that she had been away from him she had almost dismissed him from her mind. Then she had met him in New York and the old resentment had flashed up into the white heat of sudden scorn. She despised him for all that she read of his life in that encounter face to face—the drinking, the gambling, the cheap, false amusements, and the painted woman at his side. And when he returned, after ignoring her letters and allowing his mining claim to lapse, and resumed his fault-finding complaints she had put him back in his place.

But that was just it, the outburst had relieved her; she had lost her cherished hate. In the quiet of her room she remembered how he looked, so beaten and yet so bold. She remembered the blow that her words had given him when he had learned that his stock was doomed; and that greater blow when he saw even his equity placed in jeopardy by the jumping of the Old Juan. Had it not been a little cruel, to fly at him, after that? He was wrong, of course, but the occasion was great and his mind was on other things. Yet he

had told her, and repeated it, that she had sold him out—and that she could never endure.

She remained resolutely away until late in the afternoon and then she returned to the office. It was her office, anyway, as much as his; and besides, she had left her ear-'phone. Not that she needed it, of course, but she must keep up appearances, although it seemed impossible to persuade people that she was no longer deaf. Even Rimrock had shouted in that old, maddening way the instant she did not reply. It was natural, of course, but with him at least she would like it the other way. She would like him to speak as he had spoken at first when he had come to her office alone. But those days were gone, along with eavesdropping Andrew McBain, their first happiness and the golden dreams. All was gone—all but the accursed gold.

She found Rimrock alone in the silent office, running through filing cases in blundering haste.

"What are you looking for?" she asked demurely and as he noticed her amusement he smiled.

"Examining the books," he answered grimly. "Say, how much money have we got?"

"Oh, don't look there!" she said, pushing the filing drawer back into its case. "Here, I'll give you our last monthly statement, brought down to January first."

She ran through the files and with a practised hand drew out the paper he wanted.

"Much obliged," he mumbled and as he glanced at the total he blinked and his eyes opened up. "All right!" he said, "that will last me a while. I might as well spend it, don't you think? I'm General Manager, as long as I last, and it will take money to beat this man Bray."

"What, have you taken charge of the legal part of it? I thought that was left to McVicker and Ord?"

"McVicker and Ord! They're a couple of muttonheads. Why, Bray has got Cummins and Ford. I know they're good, because they beat me out of the Gunsight; but they're nothing to the men I've retained. I've telegraphed money to ten attorneys already—the best in the United States, so Ben Birchett, my Geronimo lawyer, says—and they'll be here within a few days. It'll be a galaxy of the finest legal talent that ever took a case in Arizona. Ben told me frankly when I called him up Long Distance that we've got a very weak case; but you wait, they'll frame something up. We're fighting Stoddard, there isn't a doubt about it; but we're spending his money, too."

He met her gaze with a disarming grin and the reproaches died on her lips. After all, it was his right, after what he had suffered, to have this one, final fling. He was nothing but a child, a great overgrown boy, and it was fitting he should have his jest. And between him and Stoddard, the ice-cold lightning-calculator who kept count of every cent, there was really little to choose. Only Rimrock, of course, was

human. He was a drunken and faithless gambler; a reckless, fighting animal; a crude, thoughtless barbarian; but his failings were those of a man. He didn't take advantage of everybody—it was only his enemies that he raided.

"Yes, you're spending his money," she conceded pleasantly, "but part of it is yours and—mine."

"Well, all right, then," he said after a moment's thought, "I'll show you where it's gone."

"No, I didn't mean that," she said, "my point is, don't throw it away. If we lose this suit, and I think we will, you'll need something to make a fresh start."

"Nope, it's dead loss to me, whichever way you figure it—if I don't spend it, it goes to Stoddard. He won't have any mercy on me, even if we win this case. My stock is gone when the ninety days are up. The most I can hope is to beat him on this suit. That will make my Tecolote stock more valuable and maybe I can borrow the money to pay off the debt at the bank. But I'm busted, right now; I can see my finish. It's just a question of the epitaph the boys will put over my grave, and I want that to be: 'He did his damnedest!' Then I'll get out of town with whatever I have left and begin all over again, down in Mexico."

"Oh, won't that be fine!" she cried enthusiastically, but Rimrock looked at her dubiously.

"What, to lose all my money?"

"No, to begin all over again. To get away from this trickery and dishonesty and the jealousy that spoils

all your friends; and start all over again, get back to real work and build up another success!"

"You sure make it sound attractive," he answered glumly, "but there are some people who hate to lose. That's me—but cheer up, I haven't lost yet. You wait till I hire a few expert geologists and I'll prove that the Old Juan doesn't apex anything. No, absolutely nothing; not even the ore that's under it. I've got a couple of them coming, now."

She looked at him frowning.

"I don't like you that way," she said impatiently. "It sounds low and cheap, and I don't like it. And I hope when it's over and you've lost your case that you'll see that this lawlessness doesn't pay. Of course it's too late now, because I know you're going to do it, but I do want you to know how I feel. I liked you best when you were a poor, hard-handed prospector without a dollar to your name; but what happiness has it brought you—or me, either, for that matter—all this money we've got from the mine?"

"Well," began Rimrock; and then he stopped and pondered. "Say, it hasn't brought us much, after all, now has it? I've helped out a few friends, but seems like they've all gone back on me. But what makes you think I'll lose?"

He was watching her furtively, but she sensed his purpose and as quickly was on her guard.

"Because you're wrong," she said. "You haven't a case. You know you let your title lapse and now

you're trying to evade the law. You're wrong, in the first place; and in the second place you're trying to be dishonest. I hope you do lose it."

"Uhrr! Thanks!" he jeered. "The same to you! If I lose, I guess you lose, too."

"I don't care," she persisted, "I want you to lose—and after it's all over, I'll tell you something."

She smiled in a mysterious and tantalizing way, but Rimrock's face never changed.

"You'd better tell me now, while you've got the chance," he suggested sitting down by her desk. "And by the way, how come you're hearing so well?"

"Oh, that reminds me!" she cried laughing gayly and picked up her ear-'phone. "What was that you said?" she asked with mock anxiety, slipping the headband over her head, and Rimrock looked at her in surprise.

"By grab!" he exclaimed, "I believe you *can* hear! What do you carry that thing around for?"

She twitched it off and gazed at him again with a triumphant but baffling smile.

"Yes, I *can* hear," she admitted quietly, "but I'll have to ask you not to tell. Why, Mr. Jepson and some of these people fairly shout when they speak to me now."

She smiled again in such a cryptic manner that Rimrock became suddenly aroused.

"Say, what's going on?" he cried, all excitement, "have you been listening in on their schemes?"

"Why, Mr. Jones!" she exclaimed reproachfully

but still with a twinkle in her eye; and Rimrock leaned forward eagerly.

"Yes, that's my name," he answered, "go ahead and tell me what you know."

"No, you wouldn't put it to the best of purposes—but hold this over your ear." She held up the attachment to his ear and, as she ran up the dial, she whispered:

"Do you think you could hear through a wall?"

"You bet!" replied Rimrock and as she took it away he gave her a searching glance. "I wonder," he said, "if you're as innocent as you look." And Mary broke down and laughed.

"I wonder," she observed, but when he questioned her further she only shook her head.

"No, indeed," she said, "I won't tell you anything—but after you lose, come around."

"No, but look!" he urged. "If I lose, you lose. Come through and tell me now."

"You called me a crook," she answered spitefully, "you said I had sold you out! Do you think I will tell you, after that? No, you're so smart, go ahead—Spend your money! Hire a lot of lawyers and experts! You think I sold you out to Stoddard? Well, go ahead—*you* try to buy me! No, I'm going to show you, Mr. Rimrock Jones, that I have never sold out to anybody—that I can't be bought, nor sold. You need that lesson more than you need the money that you are wasting in vice and fraud."

She ended, panting with the anger that swept over her, and Rimrock thrust out his chin.

"Huh! Vice and fraud!" he repeated scornfully, "you certainly don't hunt for words. Is it vice and fraud to hire lawyers and experts and try to win back my own mine? What do you want me to do—go and kow-tow to Stoddard and ask him to please step on my neck?"

"No, I want you to do what you're going to do—spend the Company's money, and lose. That money is part mine, but I'll be glad to part with it if it will cure you of being such a fool."

They faced each other, each heated and angry, and then he showed his teeth in a smile.

"I know what's the matter," he said at last, "you're jealous of Mrs. Hardesty!"

She checked the denial that leapt to her lips to search for a more fitting retort.

"You flatter yourself," she said, smiling thinly, "but you do not flatter me."

"Yeah, 'vice and crime.' That shows where you good people fall down. I suppose you think that she was an *awful* disreputable woman! Well, she wasn't; she was just another of Stoddard's stool-pigeons that he uses to work suckers like me. She got me back there and helped him bleed me and then she kissed me good-bye—so!"

He made the motion of slamming a door and his eyes turned dark with fury.

"She had a good line of talk herself," he sneered, "and her heart was as black as that book!"

He pointed to a book that was black indeed but Mary said never a word. This was news to her, and perhaps it was balm that would in time cure a wound in her heart, but now it rankled deep.

"I think," she said at last, "the most pitiable spectacle in the world is you, Mr. Rimrock Jones. You try to buy friends, as if they were commodities, and you try to buy them wholesale. You set up the drinks and try to buy the whole town, but what is the result of it all? Why, you simply attract a lot of leeches and bloodsuckers whose sole purpose is to get your money. And then, when you finally become disillusioned, you class them all together. You don't deserve any friends!"

"Well, maybe not!" he answered truculently, "but who's got the most, right now? You or me? Look at Old Hassayamp Hicks, and Woo Chong—and L. W.!"

A swift, almost instantaneous, change swept over her sensitive face and then she closed down her lips; yet Rimrock was quick enough to see it.

"What's the matter?" he challenged. "What's the matter with L. W.? Ain't he stood by me like a rock? He's in the hospital right now with a busted arm, and I won't hear a word against him. No, my troubles have been with women."

A swifter spasm, almost ugly in its rage, came over

Mary Fortune's lips; and then she shut them down again.

"Yes," she said with a sarcastic smile, "I've heard women say the same about men."

"Oh, you've always got some come-back," he went on blusteringly, "but I notice you don't say nothing against L. W. Now there was a man who had done me dirt—he sold me out, on the Gunsight—but when I trusted him and treated him white L. W. became my best friend. He stood right up with me against Andy McBain and that bunch of hired gun-fighters he had; and he'd lay down his life for me, to-morrow. And yet he just worships money! He thinks more of a dollar than I do of a million, but could Stoddard buy him out? Not on your life—he voted for the dividend! But where was my lady friend at?"

He glared at her insultingly and, torn by that great passion that comes from devotion misprized and sacrifice rewarded with scorn, she leapt up to hurl back the truth. But a vision rose before her, the picture of L. W. sobbing and bleeding, his arm flapping beside him, striving vainly to retrieve his treachery; and the words did not pass her lips.

"*I'm* not your friend, if that's what you mean," she answered with withering scorn. "I'm against you, from this moment, on."

"Well, let it ride, then," he responded carelessly, and as she swept from the room, he smiled.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Show-down

FOR the few brief weeks before the great trial the office was swarming with men. There were high-priced lawyers and geologists of renown and experts on every phase of the suit, and in the midst of them sat Rimrock Jones. He wore his big black hat that had cost him a hundred dollars—including the hat-check tips at the Waldorf—and his pistol was always at his hip. Every step of their case was carefully framed up in the long councils that took place, but at the end Rimrock lost his nerve. For the first time in his life, and with all eyes upon him, he weakened and lowered his proud head. He had a hunch he would lose.

For all those weeks he had been haunted by a presence that always flitted out of his way; but now she was there, in the crowded court-room, and she greeted him with a slow, mirthless smile. It was Mary Fortune and he remembered all too well that time when she had told him he would lose. She had said he would lose because he had no case, and because he used money instead; but he knew from that smile she

had other reasons for pronouncing his doom in advance. He had lawyers hired who told him, to the contrary, that he had a very good case—and Stoddard had spent money, too. Not openly, of course, but through his attorneys; but that was customary, it was always done. No, behind all her professions of respect for the judiciary and of worship for the law, she must know that the right sometimes failed. But behind that smile there was the absolute certainty that in some way he was certain to lose.

He met her glance as he came into the court-room surrounded by a troop of his friends, surrounded by lawyers and mining experts and geologists who professed to see through the earth, and before her gaze he halted and blenched. There was another person there who regarded him coldly with a glance like a rapier thrust; but it was not of Stoddard he was afraid. It was of Mary Fortune, who had come out against him and who could hear through walls with her 'phone. What she knew might have helped him, but she was against him now—and she had told him in advance that he would lose.

As Rimrock sat thinking, his eyes cast down and his mind far back in the past, a great blow was struck by the bailiff's mallet and the crowd rose up to its feet. A stern-faced judge, robed in the black cloak of his office, stepped out through the curtains behind the bench and as Rimrock stared the bailiff beckoned him sharply and he scrambled to his feet with the rest.

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" cried the bailiff in the words that echoed of the past. "The United States District Court is now in session!"

He struck again as the judge took his seat and Rimrock sank down into his chair. But he had stood in respect to the majesty of the law and it was then that his hunch came back. For this was no appeal to an elected judge or the easily swayed emotions of a jury; it was an appeal to the cold, passionless mind of a man who considered nothing but the law.

Ike Bray was there, looking pinched and scared, and the two guards who had witnessed his relocation, and they testified to the facts. In vain Rimrock's lawyers orated and thundered or artfully framed up their long questions; it took days to do it, but when the testimony was all in it was apparent that Ike Bray's claim would hold. But this was only the beginning of the battle, the skirmish to feel out the ground; and now the defense brought up its big guns. One after the other they put experts on the stand to testify to the geology of the Tecolote; but Cummins and Ford produced others as eminent who testified to the opposite effect. So the battle raged until the wearied judge limited the profitless discussion to one more day, and then Cummins and Ford launched their bombshell.

"Your Honor," began Cummins as he rose with a great document. "I should like to introduce as evidence this report, which unfortunately has only just come to hand. As Your Honor has intimated the tes-

timony of hired experts is always open to suspicion of bias, and especially where great interests are at stake; but I am able to offer for the information of the Court a document both impartial and thorough. It is the combined reports of three practical geologists employed by the Tecolote Company itself, though at a time preceding this suit and intended solely for the purposes of exploration. As Your Honor will observe, although the reports were made independently and under orders to seek nothing but the facts, they agree substantially in this: that, within an extension of its end-lines, the Old Juan claim is the true apex of the entire Tecolote ore body."

He handed over the report and sat down in triumph, while Rimrock's lawyers all objected at once. The argument upon admitting to evidence this secret but authoritative report, consumed the greater part of the day; and at the end the plaintiff rested his case. Throughout the din of words, the verbal clashes, the long and wearisome citing of authorities and the brief "Overruled!" of the judge, Rimrock Jones sat sullen and downcast; and at the end he got up and went out. No one followed to cheer or console him—it was his confession of utter defeat. And the following day, when the Court convened, a verdict was rendered for the plaintiff. The lawyers and experts took their checks and departed and Rimrock Jones went home.

He went back to Gunsight where he had seen his greatest triumphs and his days of blackest defeat and

waited for Stoddard to strike. It was all over now—all over but the details and the final acceptance of terms—and, while he waited, he packed up to go. No one knew better than Rimrock himself that it was right and fitting to move on. Old hatreds and animosities, old heart-burnings and recriminations, would make Gunsight a hell-spot for him, and thwart him at every move. It was best to go on to Mexico. Even Hassayamp and L. W. agreed in this, although L. W. insisted upon staking him and declared it was all his own fault. But Mary Fortune, whether she gloried in his fall or pitied him for his great loss, kept discreetly out of his way.

She faced him the first time at the special meeting when Stoddard came to lay down his terms. As a legal fiction, a technical subterfuge, he still claimed to have bought up Bray's claim; but no one was deceived as to his intent. If he had bought Bray out it was not for the Company, but for Whitney H. Stoddard personally; and with no intention of compromising. He came in briskly, his face stern and forbidding, his eyes burning with ill-suppressed fire; and he sat down impatiently to wait. Then as Rimrock slouched in and called the meeting to order Stoddard picked up a piece of blank paper and began to tear it into long, slender shreds.

"Well, to get down to business," said Rimrock at last after the various reports had been read, "we have come here, I take it, for a purpose."

He raised his eyes and met Stoddard's defiantly, but Mary looked away.

"Yes, we have," answered Stoddard with business-like directness, "I have a proposition to make. As I suppose you both know I have bought up the claim of Mr. Bray, as decided by the court. That claim, of course, practically invalidates your stock since it takes away possession of the mine; but I am willing to make you a generous offer. Our undivided profits—minus the amount, of course, that our General Manager has squandered on his defense—will be shared among us, pro rata. This will be in cash, and in consideration of the payment, I shall expect you to turn in your stock."

"What? For nothing?" cried Mary; but Rimrock did not flinch though his face became set with rage.

"It can hardly be called nothing," replied Stoddard severely, "when your own share comes to over two hundred thousand dollars. And as for Mr. Jones, he understands very well that I can claim every dollar he has."

"Well, that may be so, since you have a claim against him, but my stock is unencumbered. And since my share of the profits is in no sense a payment I shall decline to turn in my stock."

"Very well," answered Stoddard, his voice low and colorless, "I shall turn the matter over to my attorney and refuse to vote the dividend."

"Ah, I see," she murmured and glanced at Rimrock who answered with a curl of the lip.

"Mr. President," she said, "I move that the money at present in our treasury be set aside as a profit and divided among the stockholders pro rata."

"Just a moment!" warned Stoddard as Rimrock seemed about to fall in with her, "you can never collect that money. I have notified Mr. Lockhart, the treasurer of our Company, that I will hold him personally responsible for every dollar he pays out, without my official O.K. You understand what that means. Within less than a month, through my suit now in court, I can claim every share of Mr. Jones' stock. Its value, in law, has been reduced to nothing, outside of this undivided profit; and that I offer you now. If you refuse I shall get judgment, claim his entire share of the profits, and take possession of the whole Tecolote properties by right of the Old Juan decision. I advise you to accept my first offer."

"All right," spoke up Rimrock, "I knew you'd rob me. Write out the check and I'll be on my way."

"No, indeed!" cried Mary, "don't you let him fleece you! I've got something to say here, myself!"

"Well, say it to him, then," returned Rimrock, wearily, "I'm sick and disgusted with the whole business."

"Yes, naturally," observed Stoddard, reaching into his pocket and deliberately pulling out his checkbook. "Most people are, by the time I get through with them; and your case is no exception. You made the mistake of trying to oppose me."

"I made the mistake," returned Rimrock hoarsely, "of trusting a lot of crooks. But I never trusted you —don't you think it for a minute—you've got n. g. written all over you."

"Another remark like that," said Stoddard freezingly, "and I'll put my checkbook away."

"You do it," warned Rimrock without changing his position, "and I'll blow the top of your head off."

Stoddard looked at him keenly, then uncapped his pen and proceeded to fill out the stub. For a moment there was silence, broken by the soft scratching of the pen, and then Mary Fortune stood up.

"I know it is customary," she said in suppressed tones, "for men to settle everything themselves; but you, Mr. Stoddard, and you, Mr. Jones, are going to listen to me. I have put up long enough with your high-handed methods; but now, will you kindly look at that?"

She laid a paper on the table before Stoddard and stood back to watch the effect, but Rimrock only grunted contemptuously.

"Aw, fill out my check!" he said impatiently, but Stoddard was staring at the paper.

"Why, what is this? Where did you get this, Miss Fortune? I don't think I quite understand."

"No, naturally! You overlooked the fact that a woman can jump claims, too. That is a recorded copy of my re-location of the Old Juan claim, at twelve-fifty-one, on January first. Your drunken Ike Bray

came along at one-thirty and tacked his notice over mine. And now I must thank you, gentlemen, both of you, for your kind efforts in my behalf. By spending your money on this expensive lawsuit you have proved my title to the Tecolote Mine."

She sat down, smiling, and as Stoddard looked again at the paper his drawn face went suddenly white. He laid it down and with startled eyes glanced fearfully at those two. Would they stand together? Did she realize her advantage? Could he buy her off—and for how much? A hundred swift questions flashed through his mind, and then Rimrock reached over for the notice. He gazed at it quietly and then, looking at Mary, he gave way to a cynical smile.

"Could you hear through a wall?" he enquired enigmatically, and Stoddard snapped his fingers in vexation.

"Ah, I see," he observed, "not so deaf as you seem. Well, Miss Fortune, may I see you alone?"

"You may not!" she answered. "I might show you some pity, though you don't deserve it; so, knowing Mr. Jones as I do, I will leave the decision to him."

She glanced at Rimrock with a quick, radiant smile that revealed more than she knew of her heart; but his face had suddenly gone grim.

"Take him out and kill him," he advised vindictively. "That's all the advice I'll give."

"No, I don't believe in that," she answered sweetly, "but perhaps our decision can wait."

"Well, you needn't wait for me," replied Rimrock ungraciously, "because I'm through, for good and all. The first man that gives me a check for my stock——"

Whitney Stoddard reached swiftly for his checkbook and pen, but she stopped him with a warning look.

"No, there'll be nothing like that," she answered firmly. "But I moved once that we declare a dividend."

"Second the motion," murmured Stoddard resignedly; and Rimrock, too, voted: "Ay!"

Then he rose up sullenly and gazed at them both with a savage, insulting glare.

"You can keep your old mine," he said to Mary. "I'm going to beat it to Mexico!"

He started for the door and they looked after him, startled, but at the doorway he stopped and turned back.

"Where do I get that check?" he asked and after a silence Mary answered:

"From Mr. Lockhart."

"Good!" he muttered and closed the door quietly, whereat Stoddard began instantly to talk. He might have talked a long time, or only a few moments; and then Mary began to hear.

"What's that?" she asked and Stoddard repeated what he considered a very generous offer.

"Mr. Stoddard," she cried with almost tearful vehemence, "there's only one condition on which I'll even

think of giving you back your mine, and that is that Rimrock shall run it. Mr. Jepson must be fired, Mr. Jones must have full charge, and all this chicanery must stop; but if Rimrock goes away without taking his mine I'll—I'll make you wish he hadn't!"

She snatched up her papers and ran out of the room and Stoddard caught up the 'phone.

"Give me Mr. Lockhart!" he said. "Yes, Lockhart, the banker. Mr. Lockhart? This is Mr. Stoddard. If you pay Henry Jones a cent of that money I'll break you, so help me God. And listen! If you value your rating with Bradstreet, you make him apologize to that girl!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

A Gift

MARY FORTUNE was pacing up and down her room in something very like a rage. Her trunk, half-packed, stood against the wall and her pictures lay face down on the bed, and she hovered between laughter and tears. It seemed as if every evil passion in her nature had been stirred up by this desperate affray and in the fierce swirl of emotions her joy in her victory was strangely mingled with rage at Rimrock. After scheming for months to prove her superiority, and arranging every possible detail, she had been cut down in her pride and seen her triumph turned to nothing by his sudden decision to sulk. Just at the very moment when she was preparing to be gracious and give him his precious mine back he had balked like a mule and without sense or reason stormed off on his way to Old Mexico.

She returned to her packing and was brushing away a tear that had fallen somehow on a fresh waist when there was a trampling in the lobby and she heard a great voice wafted up from the corridor below.

"Come on!" it thundered like the hoarse rumbling of a bull. "Come on, I tell ye; or you'll tear my arm loose where it's knit. You dad-burned cub, if I had

two good hands—— Say, come on; ain't you got a lick of sense?"

It was L. W. Lockhart and, from the noise in the hallway, he seemed to be coming towards her door. She listened and at a single rebellious grunt from Rimrock she flew to the mirror and removed the last trace of the tear. He was bringing Rimrock for some strange purpose, and—yes, he was knocking at her door. She opened it on a struggle, Rimrock begging and threatening and trying gingerly to break away; and iron-jawed L. W. with his sling flying wildly, holding him back with his puffed-up game hand.

"Excuse me, Miss Fortune," panted L. W. brokenly, "but I just had to fetch this unmannerly brute back. He can't come, like he did, to my place of business and speak like he did about you. You're the best friend, by Gregory, that Rimrock Jones ever had; and I'll say that for myself, Miss, too. You've been a *good* friend to me and I'll never forgit it, but Rim is jest naturally a fool!"

He stopped for breath and Rimrock set back sullenly without raising his eyes from the floor.

"Now!" said L. W. as he winced at the pull, "you can decide what you're going to do. 'Are you going to bust my arm, where I got it shot in two jest by fighting Ike Bray for your mine; or are you going to stan' up here and apologize like a gentleman for saying Miss Fortune sold you out."

"I'll apologize, doggone you," answered Rimrock

between his teeth, "if you'll shut up and let go my coat."

"Well, all right, then," sighed L. W. as he cradled his injured arm, "I'll wait for you at the head of the stairs."

"You do and I'll kill you," returned Rimrock savagely. "Go on, now—and don't you come back."

He waved a threatening hand at the belligerent L. W. and watched him till he passed down the stairs. Then, turning to Mary, he set his mouth and looked her over grimly.

"Well, I apologize," he said. "Does that make you feel better? And now I hope I may go."

"No, you can't," she replied. "Now it's my turn to apologize. And I hope you have good luck."

She held out her hand and he glanced at it questioningly, then reached out and took it in his.

"I mean it," he said with sudden earnestness. "I sure-enough apologize. I'm sorry for what I done."

She patted his hand where it still held hers fast and bowed her head to keep back the tears.

"It's all right," she said. "We could never be happy. It's better to have you go."

"I'll come back!" he said with impulsive gladness. "I'll come back—if you say the word."

"Well—come back, then," she answered. "But not to quarrel; not to haggle, and backbite and scold! Oh, it makes me so ashamed! I used to be reasonable; but it doesn't seem possible now. I can't even save your

mine, that you killed a man over and went to prison to defend; I can't even do that but in such a hateful way that you won't accept it as a gift."

"Aw, you take it too hard," protested Rimrock feebly. "Say, come on over here and sit down." He led her reluctantly to the ill-fated balcony, but at the divan she balked and drew back.

"No, not there," she said with a little shudder, and turned back and sank down in a chair.

"Well, all right," agreed Rimrock, but as he drew up another he suddenly divined her thought. "Say, I apologize again," he went on abjectly, "for that time —you know—when she came. I was a Mexican's dog, there's no use talking, but—oh, well, I've been a damned fool."

"You mustn't swear so much," she corrected him gently; and then they gazed at each other in silence. "It's strange," she murmured, "how we hated each other. Almost from the first day, it seems. But no, not the first! I liked you then, Rimrock; better than I ever will again. You were so clean and strong then, so full of enthusiasm; but now—well, I wish you were poor."

"Ain't I broke?" he demanded and she looked at him sadly as she slowly shook her head.

"No, you're rich," she said. "I'm going to give you back the mine, and then I'm going away."

"But I don't want it!" he said. "Didn't I tell you to keep it? Well, I meant it—every word."

"Ah, yes," she sighed. "You told me—I know—but to-morrow is another day. You'll change your mind then, the way you always do. You see, I know you now."

"You do not!" he denied. "I don't change my mind. I stick to one idea for years. But there's something about you—I don't know what it is—that makes me a natural-born fool."

"Yes. I make you mad," she answered regretfully. "And then you will say and do anything. But now about the mine. I left Mr. Stoddard in the office just biting his fingers with anxiety."

"Well, let him bite 'em," returned Rimrock spitefully, "I hope he eats 'em off. If it hadn't been for him, and that Mrs. Hardesty, and all the other crooks he set on, we'd be friends to-day—and I'd rather have that than all the mines in the world."

"Oh, would you, Rimrock?" she questioned softly. "But no, we could never agree. It isn't the money that has come between us. We blame it, but it's really our own selves. You will gamble and drink, it's your nature to do it, and that I could never forgive. I like you, Rimrock, I'm afraid I can't help it, but I doubt if we can even be friends."

"Aw, now listen!" he pleaded. "It was you drove me to drink. A man can get over those things. But not when he's put in the wrong in everything—he's got to win, sometimes."

"Yes, but, Rimrock, there has never been a time

when you couldn't have had everything you wanted—if you wouldn't always be fighting for it. But when you distrust me and go against me and say that I've sold you out, how can a woman do anything but fight you back? And I will—I'll never give up! As long as you think I'm not as good as you are—just as smart, just as honest, just as brave—I'll never give in an inch. But there has never been a time during all our trouble, when, if you'd only listened and trusted me, I wouldn't have helped you out. Now take that letter that I wrote you in New York—I warned you they would jump your claim! But when you didn't come and complete your assessment work, I went up and jumped it myself. I got this great scar——" she thrust back her hair—"coming down the Old Juan that night. But I did it for you, I didn't do it for myself, and then—you wouldn't take back your mine!"

She bowed her head to brush away the tears and Rimrock stared and smiled at a thought.

"Well, I'll take it now," he said consolingly. "But I didn't understand. I didn't know that you want to give things—I thought you were on the make."

"Well, I was!" she declared, "I wanted all my rights—and I want them all to-day. But if you'd trust me, Rimrock, if you'd always depend on me to do the best that a woman can I'd—I'd give you anything—but you always fight me. You always try to *take!*"

"Well, I won't any more," replied Rimrock peni-

tently, yet with a masterful look in his eyes. "But you'll have to make it easy, at first."

"Why, what do you mean?" she asked rather tremulously. And then she blushed and glanced swiftly about.

"All right, Rimrock," she whispered as she took both his hands and then slipped into his arms. "I'll give you anything—if you'll only let me. But remember, I do it myself."

CHAPTER XXIX

Rimrock Does It Himself

"NOW, let's talk reason," said Rimrock at last as he put away her hands. "Let's be reasonable—I don't know where I'm at. Say, where have I been and what have I been up to? Am I the same feller that blowed into town on the blind baggage, or is this all a part of the dream?"

"It's a part of the dream," answered Mary with a sigh. "But if you help, Rimrock, it may come true."

"Do you mean it?" he demanded. "Well, I guess you must or you wouldn't give me a kiss like that. Say, you think a lot of me, now don't you, Little Spitfire? I believe you'd go through hell for me."

"No, I wouldn't," she replied. "That's just where I draw the line—because you'd be going through hell, too. You're a good man, Rimrock—you've got a good heart—but you're a drunken, fighting brute."

"Hmm!" shrilled Rimrock, "say, that don't sound very nice after what you said a minute ago."

"We're talking reason, now," said Mary, smiling wanly, "I was excited a minute ago."

"Well, get excited again," suggested Rimrock, but she pushed his hands away.

"No," she said, "I kissed you once because—well, because I liked you and—and to show that I forgive what you've done. But a woman must consider what love might mean and I'll never marry a drunkard. I know women who have and they all regretted it—it took all the sweetness out of life. A woman expects so much—so much of tenderness and sympathy and gentleness and consideration—and a drunken man is a brute. You know it, because you've been there; and, oh, you don't know how I'd hate you if you ever came back to me drunk! I'd leave you—I'd never consent for a minute to so much as touch your hand—and so it's better just to be friends."

She sighed and hurried on to a subject less unpleasant.

"Now, there's the matter of that claim. You know I hold title to the Old Juan and it gives me control of the mine. Even Stoddard acknowledges it, although he'll try to get around it; and if we press him he'll take it to the courts. But now listen, Rimrock, this is a matter of importance and I want you to help me out. I want you to attend to getting my discovery work before the ninety days has expired. Then we'll draw up a complete and careful agreement of just what we want at the mine and Whitney H. Stoddard, if I know anything about him, will be only too glad to sign it. I told him before I left him that this chicanery must cease and that you must be given back your mine. I told him you must run it, and that Jep-

son must be fired—but Rimrock, there's one thing more."

"What's that?" enquired Rimrock rousing up from his abstraction and she smiled and patted his hand.

"You mustn't fight him," she suggested coaxingly. "It interferes with the work."

"Fight who?" he demanded and then he snorted. "What, me make friends with Stoddard? Why, it's that crooked hound that's at the bottom of all this. He's the man that's made all the trouble. Why, we were doing fine, girl; we were regular pardners and I wasn't drinking a drop. I was trying to make good and show you how I loved you when he butted in on the game. He saw he couldn't beat us as long as we stood together and so he sent out that damnable Mrs. Hardesty. He hired her on purpose and she worked me for a sucker by feeding me up with big words. She told me I was a wonder, and a world-beater for a gambler, and then—well, you know the rest. I went back to New York and they trimmed me right, and if it wasn't for you I'd be broke. No, I'll never forget what *you* did for me, Mary; and I'll never forget what he did, either!"

"No, I hope you won't," she said, winking fast, "because that's what's ruined your life. He can always whip you when it comes to business, because you fight in the open and he never shows his hand. And he's absolutely unscrupulous—he'd think no more of ruining our happiness than—than you do, when you're

fighting mad. Oh, if you knew how I suffered during all those long months when you were stock-gambling and going around with—her."

"Aw, now, Mary," he soothed, wiping away the sweat from his brow; and then he took her into his arms. "Now, don't cry," he said, "because I went back there to look for you—I paid out thousands of dollars for detectives. And when I saw you that time, when you came down the stairway in that opera house back in New York, I never went near her again. I quit her at the door and had detectives out everywhere; but you went away, you never gave me a chance!"

"Well," she sobbed, "we all make mistakes, but—but I was so ashamed, to be jealous of *her*. Couldn't you see what she was? Couldn't you tell that type of woman? Oh, Rimrock, it was perfectly awful! Everybody that saw you, every woman that looked at her, must have—oh, I just can't bear to think about it!"

"My God!" groaned Rimrock; and then he was silent, looking sober-eyed away into space. It came over him at last what this woman had borne from him and yet she had been faithful to the end. She had even befriended him after he had accused her of treachery, but she had reserved the privilege of hating him. Perhaps that was the woman of it, he did not know; if so, he had never observed it before. Or perhaps—he straightened up and drew her closer—perhaps she was the One Woman in the world! Perhaps she was the

only woman he would ever know who would love him for himself, and take no thought for his money. She had loved him when he was poor——

"Say," he said in a far-away voice, "do you remember when I saw you that first time? You looked mighty good to me then. And I was so ragged, and wild and woolly, but you sure came through with the roll. The whole roll, at that. Say, I ain't going to forget that —Rimrock Jones never forgets a friend. Some time when you ain't looking for it I'm going to do something for you like giving that roll to me. Something hard, you understand; something that will take the hide off of me like parting with the savings of a lifetime. But I haven't got anything to give."

"Yes, you have," she said, "and it will hurt just the same. It is something you had on then."

"Huh, I didn't have hardly anything but my clothes and my gun. You don't mean——"

"Yes, I mean the gun."

"Oh!" he said, and fell into silence while she watched him from beneath her long lashes. He reached back ruefully and drew out his pistol and twirled the cylinder with his thumb.

"That's a fine old gun," he said at last. "I sure have carried it many a mile."

"Yes," she answered, and sat there, waiting, and at last he met her eyes.

"What's the idea?" he asked, but his tone was resentful—he knew what was in her mind.

"I just want it," she said. "More than anything else. And you must never get another one."

"How'm I going to protect myself?" he demanded hotly. "How'm I going to protect my claims? If it wasn't for that gun, where'd the Old Juan be to-day?"

"Well, where is it?" she asked and smiled.

"Why——"

"Why, you lost it," she supplied. "And I won it," she added. "It stands in my name to-day."

"Yes, but Andrew McBain——"

"Was he any smarter than Stoddard? Well, I didn't need any gun."

"Yes, but look who you are!" observed Rimrock sarcastically and balanced the old gun in his hand.

"Well, there we are," she remarked at last. "Right back where we started from."

"Where's that?" he enquired.

"Back to our first quarrel," she sighed. "A woman never forgets it. It's different, I suppose, with a man."

"Yes, I reckon it is," he agreed despondently. "We try to forget our troubles."

"Does it help any to get drunk?" she asked impersonally and he saw where the conversation had swung. It had veered back again to his merits as a married man and the answer had come from his own lips. He knew too well that look in her eye, that polite and polished calm. Mary Fortune was not strong for scenes. She just made up her mind and then all the devils in hell could not sway her from her purpose.

And she had rejected him as a gun-fighter and a drunkard.

"Here! Now!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet in alarm. "Now here, don't get me wrong! Say, I'd give my heart's blood, just for one more kiss—do you think I'll hold out on this gun? Here, take it, girl, and if I ever drink a drop I want you to shoot me dead!"

He handed over the gun and she took it solemnly, but with a twinkle far back in her eyes.

"I couldn't do that," she said, "because I love you too much, Rimrock."

"And another thing," he went on, smiling grimly as she kissed him.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Well, I'll give you 'most anything, if you'll only ask for it; but remember, I do it myself."

THE END

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